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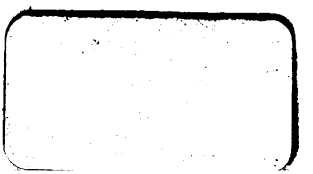

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Shooting
On a Small Income

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A WELL-KEPT RIDE

Shooting

On a Small Income

How to Shoot and the Management of Small Shootings

By

Charles Edward Walker

Westminster

Archibald Constable & Co., Ltd.

1900

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Preface

SHOOTING is always put down as a very expensive form of sport and it is true that if it is worth anything, it cannot be obtained for nothing, but this rule is universally true. A certain amount of money must of course be spent on a shoot, but time and trouble may take the place of hard cash to some extent.

Time and trouble, however, are not of much use, unless he who gives them also possesses knowledge, and the value of the former must to a great extent depend on the amount of the latter. It is with the idea of imparting, to the best of my ability, such knowledge of shooting and the management of a shoot as can be given in a book, that I place the following chapters before my reader. What they contain is not for the

man to whom it matters but little whether his shooting costs him a hundred or so more one year than it does another, but for the man of moderate means who wants to get as good shooting as he can, but who does not want to spend more money than is necessary. It is for this reason that I have omitted such branches of shooting as grouse driving.

To me it has always appeared that the rich man who leaves all in the hands of his keepers, and simply pays and goes out to have birds put over him, loses a great part of the pleasure which may be obtained from a shoot. If a man is a keen sportsman in the true sense, it should be a pleasure to him to learn as much as possible about the game he pursues, including the best ways of getting at it and bringing it to him, and he will find that knowledge of this kind is very useful.

Much that is connected with shooting, can only be learned by experience and practice, but on the other hand experience

combined with ignorance is likely to produce disastrous results.

My reader must therefore not suppose that I hope to impart such knowledge as will make the tyro an expert judge of a gun, a good shot, and capable of managing a shoot to the best advantage. Such knowledge and powers cannot be gained from books, but I hope to give such information as may help the beginner to attain, and to hasten his attainment of them.

CHARLES WALKER

MAYFIELD, SUSSEX
July, 1900

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Shooting on a Small Income

CHAPTER I

The Gun

TO the man of moderate means, the choice of a gun is a serious matter. He wants a good gun, but he does not want to pay more for it than he need. To begin with, I must advise the novice not to buy a gun unless it is by a well-known maker. Many cheap guns are put on the market, but besides not being reliable from the shooting point of view, many of them are absolutely dangerous. The best of them are likely to cost more than they are worth in being repaired, and unless shooting is given up, a good gun will have to be bought in the end. It is best to go to

a well-known maker, and buy a gun direct from him. The names of good makers have sometimes been put on inferior guns, which have then been sold at a price which would have been cheap in the extreme for the article they represented, but as a matter of fact was exceedingly dear. It is not going too far to say that this class of gun is, as a rule, very dear at any price. In going to a well-known maker, you make sure of getting what you pay for, and at the same time you ought to be able to get a gun which fits you.

Fortunately, there are several firms of gun-makers who turn out really reliable and good shooting plain guns at a moderate price. It is of course impossible for me to state any definite price as the lowest at which such a gun can be bought. Some makers only have one price, and that a very high one, but there are, as I have already said, some good firms who make moderate-priced guns. The beginner should be prepared to pay about

£15, though there are some firms who turn out a very sound gun for rather less.

From this low price upwards, is simply a question of expense, but I would disabuse my reader's mind of the only too common idea, that when a man buys a sixty or seventy guinea gun, he is paying chiefly for the name of the maker, and not for the actual work put into the gun. Whether it is worth while paying more than forty or fifty guineas for a gun, is a matter of opinion, but only because it is questionable whether the extra finish is worth the extra money. A sixty guinea gun is practically a sixty guinea gun, no matter from whom you get it. That is to say, the maker who can sell you a sound and reliable gun for £15, will not be able to make you a gun, similar in quality and workmanship to those of the maker who turns out nothing under sixty guineas, at less than the latter price.

The best advice I can give as to buying

a gun is, buy as good a one as you can, but in any case if you want to be safe and want to shoot, buy one from a well-known maker, and do not be tempted to buy the cheap rubbish which is put on the market. It would be out of place in a book of this kind to recommend the guns of any particular maker, but if my reader does not already know, he will have no difficulty in finding out which of the well-known makers will make him a gun at a price to suit his pocket.

I have heard people suggest that it is wise to begin shooting with a hammer gun or even a muzzle loader, but it is difficult to see any object in doing this. The hammerless gun is much safer than the hammer gun, just as the breech-loading hammer gun is safer than the muzzle loader. Besides being the safest in many ways, the hammerless gun is also the handiest, so that the man who shoots much will probably use one in the end. Such being the case, it is best

to begin with one, for it is always wise to begin with the kind of gun with which one intends to go on. When the safety bolt is on a hammerless gun, there is no chance of its jarring off, while a hammer gun at half cock may under certain circumstances jarr off, to say nothing of the possibility of the hammers being let down accidentally when they are being put at half cock. Cold fingers do not interfere with the safety of a hammerless gun, while they are likely to cause the hammers to slip down when a hammer gun is being put at half cock. A hammer gun may possibly be bought a little cheaper, but the difference in price is not proportionate to the difference in safeness and handiness. Therefore, I strongly advise the beginner to start with a hammerless gun, for he is sure to want one in the end, and the less change he has in guns the better.

There are several additional pieces of mechanism put into guns nowadays, but these

mean an addition to the price. The ejecting mechanism, which throws out the empty cartridge case automatically when the gun is opened, may add as much as £4 or £5 to the price of the gun. An ejector is not necessary, however, unless a certain amount of quick shooting is expected.

There are many single trigger guns on the market at present, but they cost a good deal of money. The advantages claimed for them are, that the two barrels may be fired more quickly after each other than in the case of the double trigger gun; the sore finger, which the trigger guard and the front trigger cause in some people by knocking against the second or first finger with the recoil, is avoided; both barrels cannot go off together; and the alignment of the gun is not affected when the second barrel is fired, as the hand is not moved to get to the other trigger. The beginner need not, however, trouble himself about the single trigger gun, for its advantages

are slight, and many people question whether it does not possess disadvantages which overbalance its advantages.

As I have to refer to various parts of a gun in this and in subsequent chapters, I will here describe those which should be known by every shooter.

1, in the illustration, is the toe of the butt; 2, is the heel of the butt; 3, is the comb of the butt; 4, is, in sporting guns, generally called the hand or handle, but is also known as the grip, the small of the butt and the neck; 5, is the false breech. This is the solid piece of metal which stops up the breech end of the barrels when the gun is closed. It is most important that it should fit perfectly. 6, is the fore-end. This is a separate piece of the gun, and is removed before taking off the barrels. 7, is the bead or fore-sight; 8, is the top rib. The rib is the strip of metal between the barrels. The bottom rib is between the barrels on the under surface.

Always insist on having an oval handle to a gun.* Do not have one with too high a rib, and if you are buying a second-hand gun, make sure that it does not shoot low.*

The strikers are the small metal pins which come through the false breech and strike the cap in the cartridge when the gun is fired.

Cast-off and cast-on, are the terms used to denote the lateral divergence of the stock from the longitudinal axis of the barrels. In cast-off the divergence is outwards, in cast-on it is inward. (See illustration.)

Bend is the term used to denote the amount of divergence of the stock downwards from the longitudinal axis of the barrels. (See illustration.)

The bore, gauge, or calibre of a gun is the measurement of the diameter of the inside of the barrel. In shot guns the number of the bore is taken from the number of spherical

* See Chapter II., "The Well-Fitting Gun."

1. Toe of butt. 2. Heel of butt. 3. Comb. 4. Hand or Handle. 5. False breech. 6. Fore-end. 7. Bead or Fore-sight. 8. Top rib.

FIG. 1

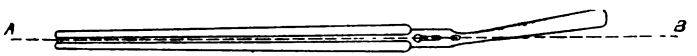


FIG. 2

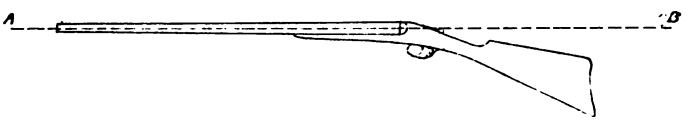


FIG. 1. An exaggerated case of cast-off. A B is the longitudinal axis of the barrels.

FIG. 2. The amount of bend is the distance of the heel of the butt from A B, the longitudinal axis of the barrels.

lead bullets in the pound, each of which exactly fits the barrel. Thus a spherical bullet weighing exactly $\frac{1}{12}$ of 1 lb., ought to exactly fit a 12-bore gun.

A barrel may be either cylinder or choke. The theoretical cylinder barrel is one in which the inside measurement is the same throughout the bore. The nominal cylinder, however, has a very minute contraction at the muzzle, and practically all cylinder barrels are not true cylinders, but nominal. In the choke-bore barrel there is a contraction beginning near the muzzle. This throws a better pattern, that is to say, the shot do not spread so rapidly after leaving the muzzle of a choke-bore barrel as in the case of a cylinder barrel.

The best kind of boring for game guns is a nominal cylinder for one barrel, and a modified choke for the other, though many people prefer both barrels cylinder. The full-choke shoots too close for the majority

of shots obtained at game in the field, and if a bird is hit with the charge at too close quarters, it will be knocked to pieces.

The chamber is that part of the barrel which is enlarged to admit the cartridge. The cone is where this enlargement ends and the true bore of the barrel begins.

Having, I hope, made clear some of the technical terms used in gunnery, I will return to the all-important subject of buying a gun.

Some people shoot with 16, 20, or even 28-bore guns. Do not, however, be induced to buy anything but a 12-bore. The only advantage of the smaller bores is that they are lighter. Most healthy men are quite capable of carrying a gun which weighs about 6½ or 6¾ lbs., and you should be able to get a 12-bore which does not weigh more than this. The idea, which seems to be fairly prevalent, that a small-bore gun shoots closer than a 12, is quite a mistake. It is certainly

a little more handy, as it is lighter, but with its lightness, its advantages over the larger bore end. The shot from a small-bore spread more quickly, and so, though it may throw as large a pattern up to about 30 yards, it cannot be depended upon to kill at a long range. Those who do not believe this statement, would do so if they tried the different bores at a plate, and if they tested the penetration at 45 yards. Probably as many as fifty 12-bore guns are sold to one of other bores, so that you are less likely to get into difficulties through running short of cartridges if you use a 12-bore.

A second-hand gun in good condition and by a good maker, may sometimes be picked up at a small price. Here care must be taken to make sure that it is in good condition. The breech must fit perfectly, there must be no flaw in the barrels, and the mechanism must be in good order and work smoothly. The best thing to do in the case of a

second-hand gun, if you have no experience of guns, is to get a friend who has, to look at and examine it before you buy it. Do not buy one with barrels shorter than 28 inches—30 inches is the usual length of the barrels of a 12-bore gun, and this is no doubt the best length.

Keeping a gun clean adds a considerable period to its life. Most of the nitro powders will cause corrosion inside the barrels much more rapidly than black powder. If, however, the barrels are well rubbed out in the evening after shooting, there is no risk of this happening. Run some clean tow through the barrels first to take away the greater part of the fouling, then do the same with some tow anointed freely with vaseline. Finish up with an oiled rag, and don't spare putting plenty of elbow-grease into each of these proceedings.

Always ease the springs of a hammerless gun before putting it away; dummy cartridges are sold specially for this purpose. As the

gun is put at full cock automatically when it is opened, unless it is snapped off the springs are left at full bent. You should never snap off a gun unless there are dummy cartridges in it or something to receive the blow of the striker.

Rub your gun with a cloth, applying plenty of vaseline all over. If you have been out in the rain, dry the gun with a soft cloth carefully before applying the vaseline. A stiff bristled brush is useful to work the vaseline into odd corners.

CHAPTER II

The Well-Fitting Gun and How to Get it

IT is true that most gun-makers are able to fit a gun for a customer, but in spite of this I am quite sure that it would be a great help to the maker, and that the gun would fit better, if the purchaser understood exactly what is wanted in a gun for it to fit well.

Some men can shoot with almost any gun, but this power of adapting one's self to the shape and length of a stock, is not as a rule born in people, and but few have been able to acquire it. That more depends on the man behind the gun, than on the accuracy of the fit is undeniable, but a well-fitting gun is a great help to good shooting, and the best shot living is liable to lose form towards the end of a hard day, if he is shooting with a badly

fitting gun. You may be able to shoot fairly well with almost any gun while you are fresh, but this does not mean that you will not shoot better with a gun that fits accurately, if you know how to use the good fit to the best advantage.

About eight years ago a friend of mine had a gun made for him by a well-known firm. He was delighted with it, and could talk of nothing for a long time but the advantage and necessity of having a well-fitting gun. He was very anxious for me to go and try his new purchase with him at clay pigeons, so we went down to the maker's ground. We took shot and shot about with the gun, and broke over 80 per cent. of the pigeons. He was very delighted at this, and wrote a long letter on the fit of guns to a leading sporting newspaper. This letter gave rise to a considerable amount of correspondence, and one day he came and asked me to write and back him up with my evidence, particularly with regard

to our day's clay bird shooting. I could not make him understand, that, as there was a good six or seven inches difference in our heights, any evidence that I could give about that day's shooting, would be absolutely damning to all his arguments. He was a really good shot, but he did not know anything about the fit of guns. I have known many really good shots who did not understand what fit meant, and I have met but few who did.

The most important point in the fit of a gun is, that when the gun is brought up to the shoulder and the cheek laid in the most natural and comfortable position against the comb, the right eye must be directly in a line with the centre of the false breech and the bead. If the gun comes up so that the right eye is a little to the left or right of the centre of the false breech, it is obvious that when the bead or sight is aligned with the object aimed at, the gun will be pointing to the left or

right of the mark. A small semicircular hollow at the centre of the false breech is therefore an advantage. (See illustrations, page 21.)

It is also wrong if, on bringing the gun up and aiming at an object, more than a very slight view of the rib of the gun is seen by the shooter. In this case the gun will be found to be pointing above the object aimed at, according to the amount of rib visible when, after pointing the gun with both eyes open, the right eye is focussed on it, and not on the object aimed at. The converse of this is true when the bead is not visible at all when the gun is brought up, the gun is then pointed below the object. (See illustrations, page 21.)

It is important that the butt should come up well into the shoulder. If the gun comes up too high, so that the toe of the butt rests on the shoulder, the gun does not fit. Neither does it fit if the butt comes up too low, so that only the heel rests on the shoulder.

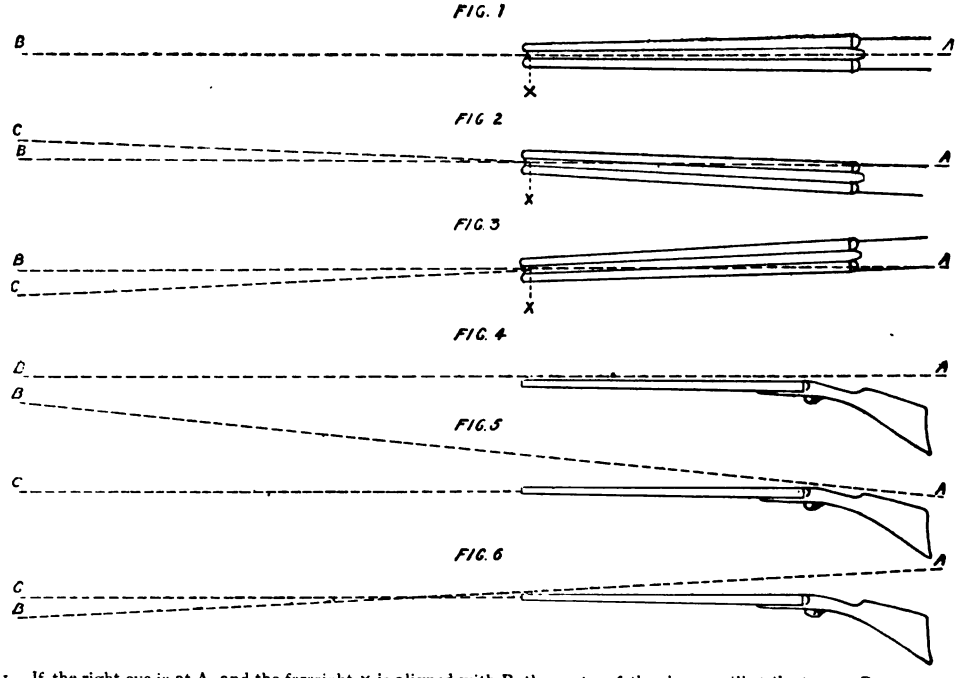


FIG. 1. If the right eye is at A, and the foresight × is aligned with B, the centre of the charge will strike true at B.
FIG. 2. If the right eye is at A, and the foresight × is aligned with B, the centre of the charge will strike at C and not B.
FIG. 3. If the right eye is at A, and the foresight × is aligned with B, the centre of the charge will strike at C and not B.
FIG. 4. If the right eye is at A, and the foresight is aligned with B, the centre of the charge will strike true at B.
FIG. 5. If the right eye is at A, true alignment is not possible, and the centre of the charge will strike low (C).
FIG. 6. If the right eye is at A, the gun can be aligned truely, but the centre of the charge will strike high (C). Pigeon guns are made to come up to the shoulder with the right eye in this position.

The Well-Fitting Gun

The stock should not be too short, or the aim is liable to be somewhat erratic, because the gun is generally brought up too far forward, and the proper alignment is put out while the gun is being brought back to the shoulder and has to be rectified, which is a loss of time.

It should not be even a little too long, because though the gun may at first be brought up in perfect alignment with the object, fatigue has a very much greater effect on the shooting of a man the stock of whose gun is a little too long for him, than if it is of the right length.

There are several difficulties to contend with in the fitting of guns, and some of them make the task of the gun-maker almost impossible. To begin with, many men, particularly those who take up shooting late, bring the gun up to the shoulder in a different manner, and put their heads on the comb in a different position every time. In such a case the gun-maker is helpless, except in

telling the shooter of his fault. I would therefore advise every man who thinks that he cannot get a gun to fit him, to notice whether he has this fault, and if he finds that he has, he can only cure himself of it by constantly thinking of it and correcting it. He should practise, every day if he can, bringing up his gun and aiming it at various objects, taking care all the time to correct his fault. A very common cause of this fault, is that the shooter catches hold of the gun with his left hand in a different place every time he brings it to his shoulder. The left hand should be so exactly in the same place every time that the browning is worn off the barrels almost in separate spots by each finger, though the latter are generally kept fairly close together.

The fitting of a gun is, of course, made much more difficult, if the right eye be weaker than the left. It is quite a mistake to suppose, though the shooter is often uncon-

scious of it, that the pointing of the gun truly at an object is done by the hands independently of the direct influence of the eyes.* It is true that a certain number of snap-shots made from the side are sometimes successful, I have indeed shot a rabbit crossing a ride in this way myself, but this must be a great chance, and the centre of the charge can but rarely hit the object at which the gun is intended to be pointed. Of course, practice will improve even this advanced stage of snap-shooting, but I maintain that the same principles do not govern snap-shooting pure and simple that govern other kinds of shooting, and that it is not the kind for a beginner to learn if he wishes to become a good shot.

Even a slight defect of vision in the right eye, if that of the left is perfect, sometimes gives the greatest difficulty to the gun-maker. Though the gun is brought up to the right

* See Chapter IV., "How to Shoot Straight," p. 58.

shoulder, the left eye affects the alignment, and drags the muzzle of the gun to the left of the object aimed at. If the gun is brought up in the same way every time, the effect of this is to make the man being fitted shoot consistently to the left, and this fault is corrected by an additional amount of cast-off. As, however, this correction is exact only when the object aimed at is at a particular distance, and very probably the shooter will gradually shoot more to the left when he has shot with his new gun a short time, it is obvious that something else is wanted.

Recourse should first be had to an oculist, and an attempt should be made to correct this faulty alignment by correcting any errors which may exist in vision. If this does not have the desired effect, I am sure that it is better to try and learn to shoot from the left shoulder than to have a gun fitted with a cross stock. I know a man well, who, at the end of one season, shot better from his left

shoulder than he had shot during any preceding season from his right, and he had shot all his life.

When being fitted with a gun, and shooting at a plate, never, after bringing the gun up to the shoulder, close the left eye and sight with the right eye only. By doing this you defeat the object of trying the gun at the plate. The gun should be fired from the position in which it is brought up to the shoulder, and never be subsequently aligned. Trials should also be made from different distances, as if the left eye affects the alignment on account of any weakness of vision of the right eye, the error of alignment will be markedly affected by the distance of the shooter from the object aimed at. As the distance becomes greater, the influence of the left eye on the aim will be increased, and, just as more accurate aim is required, so will the muzzle of the gun be dragged more away from the direct line.

It is very important that the handle of the gun should be oval and not round. If the handle is round, there is nothing to guide the sense of touch to the fact that the gun is not being held with the line which passes through the axes of the barrels in a horizontal plane. It is most important that the gun should be held true in this way, for in practically every gun the maker has made some allowance for the shot dropping, so that if the gun is twisted to the left, the charge will actually be directed at a point to the left of the object aimed at. Also, as no allowance for the shot dropping exists in this case, or at any rate is considerably lessened according to the amount of turning over of the gun, the shot will fall low. The charge will go to a point to some distance to the same side as the gun is turned on its axis, and low in either case. The extent of divergence of the charge will vary with the amount of turning and with the distance of the object. Experience will teach the shooter to

make an allowance for the shot dropping according to the distance, but as this experience will also have taught him to rely upon the elevation given in every case by his gun, twisting the gun on its axis, besides making him shoot to one side or the other, will also throw out his calculations, by eliminating a permanent elevation upon which he has learned to depend.

Having thought over these facts, the importance of having an oval handle rather than a round one, will at once strike the shooter, for anything which saves work to the eye, saves time; and time is a most important consideration in game-shooting.

CHAPTER III

Ammunition

IN advising the novice as to the purchase of ammunition, I must begin in very much the same way as I did in advising him about buying a gun. Don't buy your cartridges haphazard. Buy them from good makers; you may have to pay a little more for them, but cheap cartridges are if anything worse than a cheap gun. You cannot expect good cartridges to shoot well out of a bad gun, or a good gun to shoot well with bad cartridges.

Never buy cartridges, the cases of which are by an unknown maker. There are many cheap cases of foreign manufacture on the market which are quite unreliable. The case plays an important part in the good shooting properties of a cartridge, to say nothing of

the danger and inconvenience likely to be caused by bad cases. The brass work of the case must not be too hard or too soft, and still more, it must be elastic. This result can only be obtained by careful manipulation of the metal in the processes of manufacture. In the manufacture of English cartridge cases there are more processes gone through than in the manufacture of foreign ones; but the great difference between them is caused by the difference in the machinery used in their construction. In England the most perfectly made tools are used, and these are replaced as soon as they show signs of wear. Abroad the tools are to begin with not nearly so accurate, and are used long after they would have been discarded in a first-class English manufactory. It is therefore hardly necessary to point out that the foreign cases are likely to be irregular in size, and being otherwise faulty, are likely to split, bulge, jam, and, in fact, to suffer from all the ills that cartridge cases are liable to.

The paper and brass work of the case may be more or less judged from the outside; but there are several other factors which go towards making the reliable cartridge. The shooting qualities of a cartridge depend to a great extent upon the care with which it is loaded. It is therefore quite possible to buy cartridges, the cases of which are by well-known and reliable makers, but which, being carelessly loaded, will not shoot well. If a nitro powder is unduly compressed by the wad, if it is not compressed enough, or if the wad is not put straight over the powder, the shooting will be bad. If too tight the gun will kick unduly, if too loose the shot may just drop out of the end of the barrel, and if the wad is crooked, the main body of the shot will fly off to one side or the other of the object aimed at.

For most kinds of game shooting, black powder is unsuitable in comparison to the best kinds of nitro powders. There are a

number of these powders on the market, some possessing advantages which others do not; but none of them are quite perfect.

The advisability of using some kind of nitro powder, adds another danger to buying cheap cartridges. I have already referred to the extra care necessary in loading with these powders; but the other difficulty is the cap by which the powder in the cartridge is exploded. In the case of black powder, as long as the cap does not miss fire, all is fairly well; but with nitro powders, more than this is required. It must not give too large or too small a flash, neither must it give too much or too little heat.

Some of the nitro powders require particular cases, and others a particular cap. It is therefore most improbable that any cheap case will be suitable for all the nitro powders, and it is not likely that it will be suitable for any of them, as the caps are sure to be irregular and the cases badly made. The best

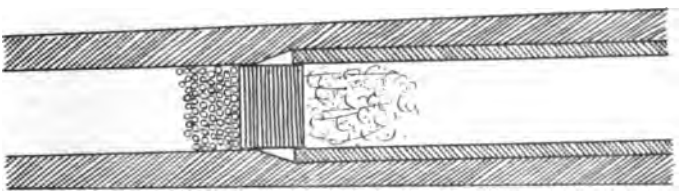
plan is, therefore, always to go to a good gun-maker, and buy your cartridges from him. Never blame a powder or a particular case unless you have obtained it from a reliable source. In such a case, if a batch of cartridges is unsatisfactory, send some of them back to the firm from which you obtained them, and state what your complaint is.

Do not be induced to use short cases in a gun chambered for ordinary ones. The chamber is made of such a length that when the turnover of the ordinary cartridge case is forced out straight by the wad over the shot leaving it, the edge of the case just reaches the breech end of the cone. The wad which is used over the powder being thick, the bore of the gun is completely filled up by it before it has quite left the cartridge case, thus allowing none of the gas generated by the combustion of the powder to escape among the shot.

It is easy to see that the wad which covers the powder cannot do this when a short case is put into an ordinary chamber. The edge of the case does not nearly reach the breech end of the cone, so the wad which covers the powder has to travel a considerable distance before it enters the bore of the gun. As the wad is made to fit the bore and not the chamber, the powder-gas can escape among the shot until the wad has reached the proper bore of the gun. This leads to balling and loss of penetration. Balling is a technical term which means that a certain number of the shot adhere together, forming a ball. A cluster of shot thus formed will act like a bullet, and as it does not fit the bore of the gun, it will fly off at an angle from the muzzle to a considerable distance. Balling of the shot, besides very probably spoiling the game if the ball hits it, is very dangerous, particularly in cover shooting.

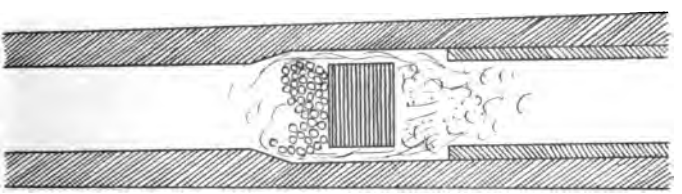
The accompanying sketches show what

FIG 1



The wad over the powder leaving a cartridge case which fits the chamber of the gun.

FIG. 2



The wad over the powder leaving a cartridge case which is shorter than the chamber of the gun.

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probably happens in the chamber of a gun with (1) a well-fitting and (2) a short cartridge.

I therefore strongly advise my reader not to shoot short cartridges from a gun chambered for ordinary ones, and to try to keep at a considerable distance from any one who does use them. If a gun is specially chambered for short cartridges it is of course necessary to use them, and with concentrated powders they will make good shooting. But they should *never* be used in a gun with the ordinary long chamber. The first short cartridges which were made, were made for a gun with a short chamber which was specially bored for them, but the idea of using them in the long chamber is a more recent development. Their only advantage when used thus is that they are more convenient to carry, otherwise they are unreliable and dangerous.

The ordinary commercial load for 12-bore

cartridges is 1⅛ oz. of shot and a charge of powder corresponding to 3 drams of black powder. Unless a special load is ordered, it is therefore very probable that cartridges loaded with this charge will be supplied.

There seems to be a tendency nowadays, however, for many of the most experienced shooters to prefer 1 1/16 oz. of shot and the same powder charge for the 12-bore gun. There are even a good many who use only 1 oz. of shot, and with these I entirely agree. It cannot, of course, be disputed that a gun may be so regulated by boring as to shoot best with 1⅛ oz. of shot, but I am speaking of a general rule and not of particular cases.

There must also be some probability of there being a particular weight which is best driven from a tube of a certain diameter by a certain force. Of course, 12-bore guns vary slightly in gauge, and

the force of the powder varies slightly, but the results in experiments I have made, have led me to believe that better results are as a rule got with cartridges loaded with 1 oz. of shot and a charge of powder corresponding to 3 drams of black powder, than are obtained from cartridges loaded with 1⅛ oz. of shot.

The better result is not in getting more shot into a 30-inch circle at a given distance, but in a more evenly distributed pattern, and as a rule a slightly better penetration. The 1⅛ oz. usually gives a pattern with a few more pellets in the circle than when 1 oz. only is used, but the difference in the distribution of the pattern in nearly every gun I have tried is very marked. The 1⅛ oz. gives a pattern which in comparison to the 1 oz. is patchy—not always, but as a rule.

I give a few examples of patterns, to illustrate my meaning, at the end of this

chapter. These patterns represent in every case a target, chosen because it was typical of a number of shots. In every case, also, those targets which are compared were made from the same barrel of the same gun, and with the same kind of powder. The guns were ordinary game guns by several well-known London makers, and were not specially bored to shoot 1 oz. of shot; in fact, in one or two cases in this particular series of experiments, I was told by the makers that the result would not be what I expected. I fired by far the greater number of the shots myself, and chose the guns haphazard. I used different kinds of nitro-powder with the same average results. The illustrations show what I believe happens, generally, in the case of the average game gun.

I therefore advise my readers to use 1 oz. of shot, unless the maker of his gun assures him that he has regulated it to shoot $1\frac{1}{8}$ oz.

If there is any doubt about the matter, he should try the gun at a plate himself. It is no use judging by one or two shots; ten at least should be tried with each charge, and an average of the pattern be taken.

A patchy pattern, besides possibly allowing the game to escape between the shot, may knock it about unduly if a patch of shot happens to strike it.

Another point in which I am inclined to think that some shooters are mistaken, is using shot of too large a size. The larger the size of the shot, the smaller the number in the charge, and the more likely the bird to escape through the pattern. With No. 5 shot, it is not probable that three times out of four more than one or two pellets would hit a partridge, or even a pheasant, at a range of 40 yards from an ordinary game gun. Unless these pellets, therefore, wound the bird in such a way as to kill it immediately, or break a wing, it will be lost,

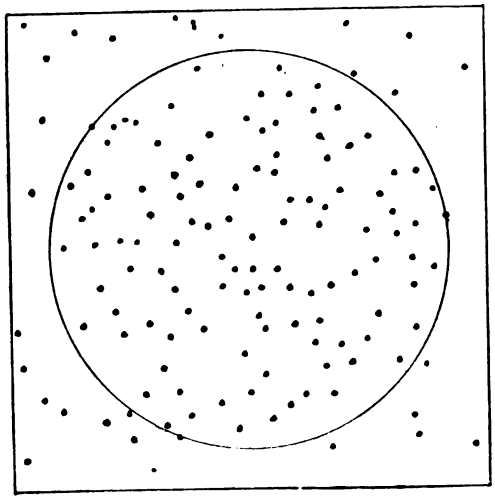
though it may very likely die subsequently from its wound. As there are more than double the number of shot in 1 oz. of No. 8 than of No. 5, more pellets will hit. There is, therefore, a much greater chance of one of them hitting it in a spot which will cause its immediate death, and in any case a number of pellets striking it at once will very likely give it such a shock as to stun it.

No. 8 has more than sufficient penetration to kill a partridge or a pheasant early in the season at 40 yards, and I do not think that a larger size than 6 is ever necessary in ordinary shooting. The popular size thirty years ago was No. 7, and this was, I am sure, a much better size for general shooting than the larger sizes which have now come into favour. Every year one meets more and more men who shoot with No. 5 shot, and a good many even use 4's. I think that the best plan is to begin the season for partridges and pheasants with

No. 8, and use 7's after the beginning of November. For grouse begin with 7's and go on to 6's.

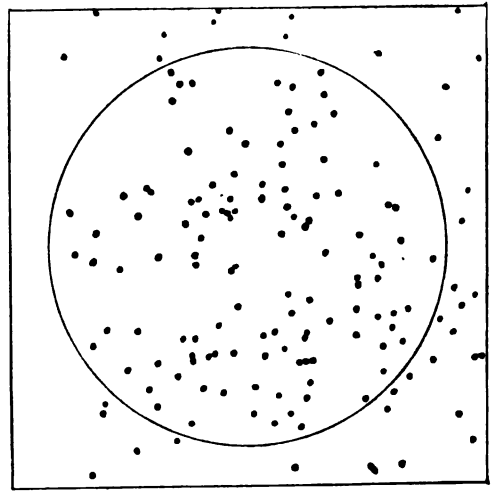
It must not be forgotten that the average distance at which game is shot is very considerably below 40 yards, probably about 25 yards, and the less the distance the greater the penetration.

FIG. 1



1 oz. No. 5 shot. Cylinder barrel. 40 yards.

FIG. 2



1⅛ oz. No. 5 shot. Cylinder barrel. 40 yards.

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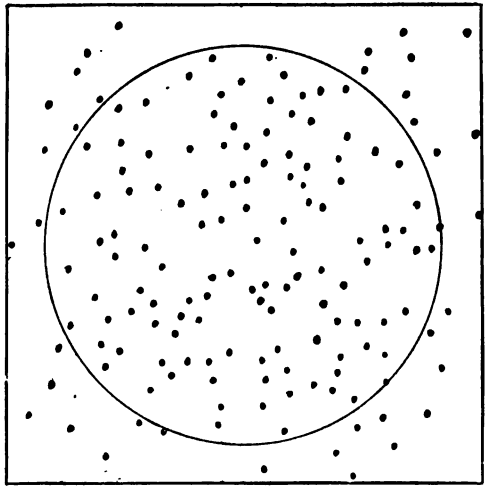
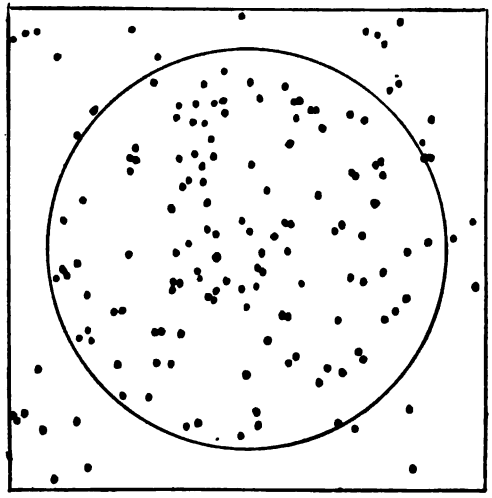
FIG. 3



1 oz. No. 6 shot. Cylinder barrel. 40 yards.

FIG. 4



1⅛ oz. No. 6 shot. Cylinder barrel. 40 yards

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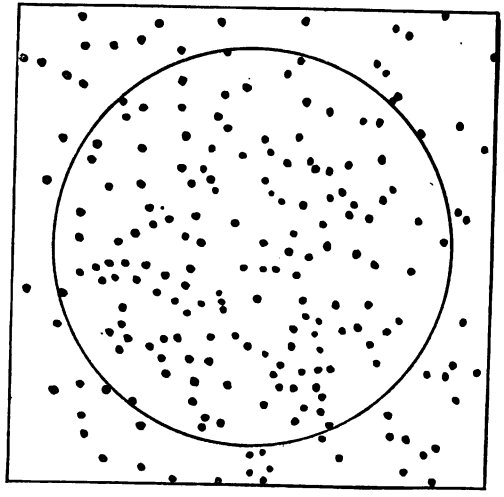
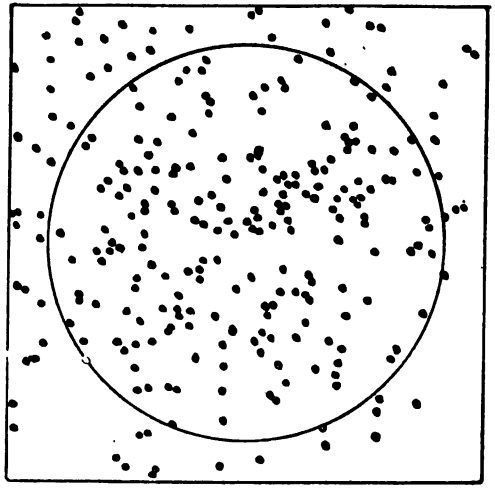
FIG. 5



1 oz. No. 7 shot. Cylinder barrel. 40 yards.

FIG. 6



1⅛ oz. No. 7 shot. Cylinder barrel. 40 yards.

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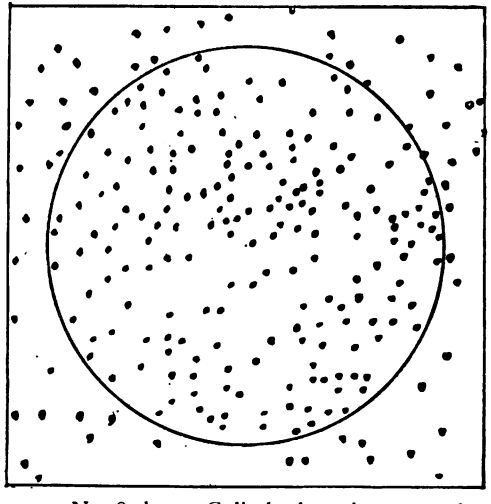
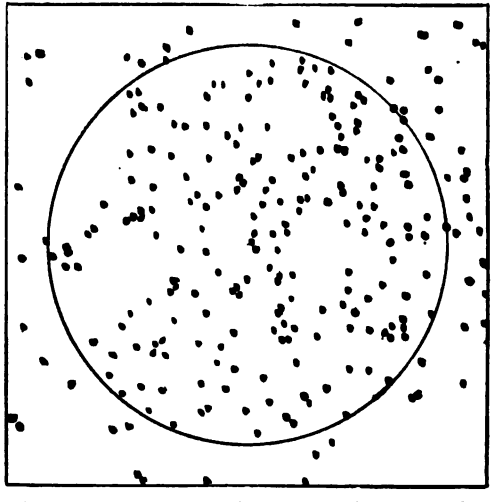
FIG. 7



1 oz. No. 8 shot. Cylinder barrel. 40 yards.

FIG. 8



1¼ oz. No. 8 shot. Cylinder barrel. 40 yards.

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CHAPTER IV

How to Shoot Straight

"THAT was a good shot! How do you manage it? Do you aim, or just point at things? Do you follow a bird? Do you shoot a certain distance in front of it?"

"I am sure I don't know. I suppose that it manages itself. I have never thought very much about how it is done."

Such questions are frequently asked of good shots by poor ones, and such are the answers which are generally given.

The fact is, a good many men who are fair, or even first-rate shots, have not a very clear idea of exactly what they do when they shoot. They therefore cannot explain how it is that they are able to accomplish a really difficult shot, or even an easy one

for the matter of that. There are not many of them who will tell you that they sight a bird with the bead of the gun; indeed most of them will say that they never sight at all. The mere fact that so many writers say that they shoot at an exact number of feet or yards in front of a crossing bird, shows that they do not know what they do when they shoot at—and kill—a bird. It is not at all probable that any two birds, in one day's shooting at any rate, will move at exactly the same pace and angle, so no definite allowance can possibly be laid down as a rule to be generally followed.

When the great difference in pace and angle at which birds are presented to the gun is considered, it becomes evident that practice and experience are what will have the greatest influence in producing a good shot. This, however, is no reason why other matters which have a great influence on improving a man's shooting, or tend to make

the beginner a good shot in as short a time as possible, should be neglected by those whom they interest.

There are two distinct ways of shooting: snap-shooting and conscious or unconscious aligning of the gun to the object aimed it. There are, of course, different gradations ranging from one extreme to the other, but if these extremes are understood, the intermediate stages need no explanation.

In true snap-shooting, no use at all is made of the bead and rib, so putting the cheek against the comb of the gun should be unnecessary. The snap-shooter's theory is, that the hand and the eye act automatically together, and the gun is pointed by the hands straight at the object looked at by the shooter. This aiming by instinct may work fairly satisfactorily for short ranges, but a little thought must convince my reader that any considerable degree of accuracy is impossible of attainment by this

means. Catching and aiming with a cricket ball are often brought forward as arguments in favour of shooting without aligning the gun, but the comparison is not a fair one. The cricketer who catches a ball, can move his hand to get it into the proper place until the ball is within a few feet, and the apparent size of a cricket ball at 3 yards can hardly be compared to the apparent size of a partridge or pheasant at 40 yards. In the case of throwing the ball, how many men could make fairly sure of hitting a pheasant or partridge which was flying rapidly, at a range of 40 yards?

Many good shots think that they make no use of the bead, rib, or false breech when shooting, but it may be safely assumed that nearly all of them do so to some extent in actual practice. To prove how inaccurate the snap-shooting aim really is, cut a V-shaped opening in a piece of paper. Put this in the breech of a gun which fits the

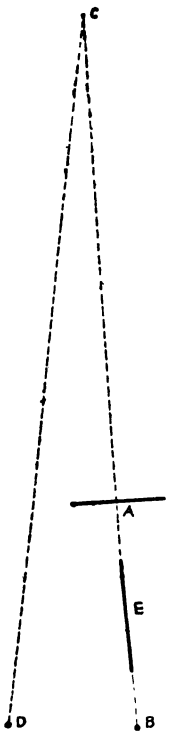
shooter so that the V is in the centre of the false breech, and the angle at the bottom of the V just on a level with the rib. Close the gun, and holding the head up straight with the cheek away from the comb, point the gun at some object. On bringing down the cheek to the comb and looking through the paper back-sight, the deviation from the true alignment will surprise those who do not believe in aligning a gun.

Being a few inches out will not prevent a certain proportion of game being killed, especially at comparatively short ranges, but a system of shooting which does not allow of greater accuracy than can be obtained in snap-shooting, can surely be improved upon.

A common objection made by shooters to aligning the gun, is that it is impossible to take aim without shutting one eye. The following little experiment will convince them that they are mistaken.

How to Shoot Straight

Choose some object to aim at. Take a ruler or some similar straight article in the right hand and a piece of paper or cardboard in the left. Interpose the cardboard (A) between the right eye (B) and the object aimed at (C), in such a way that it can still be seen by the left eye (D). Now bring up the ruler (E) between the cardboard and the right eye, and align it with the object aimed at. On removing the cardboard, it will be found that the ruler is truly aligned from the right eye, though the object aimed at was not visible to the right eye.



This experiment proves that it is possible to align accurately with both eyes open, not only at objects visible to both

eyes, but also at those which are visible to one eye only, and that not the eye from which the gun is aligned. In cases where the left eye is the master eye, the experiment holds good with the left eye.

The important point in being able to align the gun with both eyes open, is that accurate aim can be taken at a bird which is visible to the left eye only, the gun being interposed between it and the right eye. Thus the shooter can aim at a point above a rising pheasant, where he judges the bird will be when his shot reaches it, or in front of a bird crossing from left to right, keeping the bird in full view with his left eye all the time, though it cannot be seen with the right (aligning) eye.

The practice of following moving game with the gun is generally condemned, but a large number of good shots do something very like following. What they really do, however, is to catch up the game with the

swing of the gun, and to go a certain distance beyond it before the shot leave the barrel.

The trigger is pulled just before the gun is aligned with the desired spot, and the swing is kept up. Thus the gun is aligned to the point aimed at, at the instant at which the shot leave the muzzle. It is impossible to lay down any rules as to the distance in front of a moving object to which the gun should be pointed. In the case of a target which always moved at the same rate and at the same angle to the shooter, some such rule might be made, but in the case of live game, nothing but experience can teach the shooter how much allowance he must give.

The gun should be swung in the desired direction as it is brought up to the shoulder, and the swing continued until the bird is caught up or passed according to circumstances. The distance the bird is from

the gun, the angle at which it is flying across, and the pace at which it is travelling, must all be taken into consideration.

The right eye must be trained to align the gun with the utmost rapidity, and to do this independently. If the left eye influences the alignment, it drags the gun over to the left. The use of the left eye should be to see where the object aimed at is when it is not visible to the right eye, and to judge distances in conjunction with the right eye. It is impossible to judge distances with one eye only. It is most important that the aligning eye, which is generally the right eye, should be so trained as to do its work without being influenced by the other eye, though it is almost necessary and always advantageous for both eyes to be open.

All guns are made to shoot a few inches above the object aimed at, but the shot will drop more than is allowed for by the gun-maker in the case of a long shot.

Long shots should therefore be taken a little high.

A good deal may be done to improve style without actually going out shooting. Rapid aligning with both eyes open may be practised at any time and almost anywhere where there is room to swing the gun. Constantly trying the experiment with the object aimed at hidden from the right eye, which I have already described, will train the eye to align properly and quickly. The constant practice of this experiment, of aligning the gun quickly, and of judging distance and pace, will prove of the greatest possible help in learning to shoot well.

One of the commonest mistakes with beginners is shooting behind a bird. The real pace at which a pheasant or duck is travelling is much greater than it appears. Practice alone can teach the proper allowance to make in each individual case.

If shooting is begun on these principles,

a time will come when aligning, allowance, and swing are all done unconsciously. The great advantage, however, is that the shooter knows what he ought to do, and is much more capable of pulling himself together than the man who has learned to shoot without exactly knowing how he did it.

The beginner, and the poor shot who wishes to improve, should also practise holding the gun firmly and in the same place with the left hand every time it is brought to the shoulder. It is obvious that if the shooter grasps the gun in a different place with the left hand every time that he shoots, he makes improvement almost impossible. Let him therefore decide as to which is the most convenient place to grasp the gun, and stick to it. By constantly keeping it in mind, he will soon cure himself of this very serious fault. Let him also remember that he should hold the gun firmly with the left hand; the left hand is, if anything, more

important than the right in getting good alignment.

To ensure the left hand always being in the same place, it is a good plan to put the first finger along the bottom rib, just beyond the fore-end. The end of the fore-end should be felt at the bend of the middle joint of the finger. A bad fault in many men is dropping the muzzle of the gun, or pulling it away to the right when the gun is discharged. The best means of effecting a rapid cure for this is by an old way in which recruits in the Army were cured of the same fault many years ago. Go and shoot at clay birds or a plate, and let some one else load the gun. The man who loads may put in a dummy cartridge or a loaded one, and when the dummy is put in, the drop of the barrels is brought home to the shooter very forcibly. This cure may be carried a little further, so that it may be tried by the shooter alone. A number of cartridges are loaded, but in

some of them the caps are dummies, so that though the cartridges are to outward appearance exactly the same, and weigh the same, some fire and some do not.

It is astonishing how few men are able to judge distances correctly, and yet this is a most important thing to the shooter. Most people over-estimate the distance at which they shoot game. Therefore practise judging distances whenever you can. If you are out alone with a gun and shoot anything, always make a guess at the distance and pace it out. It is a good thing to try to judge distances at other times, but it is a strange fact that things you shoot at seem to be much farther off than they do when you have not got a gun. This is probably because when not shooting, the attention is confined to estimating the distance. By being a good judge of distance you will learn not to shoot at things which are obviously too far off, and also not to plaster game with shot and

spoil it by shooting at it when it is too close.

Shooting at game which is too close is a far too common fault. Always, when it is possible, let the bird get well away before firing. By doing this you will not only avoid spoiling it by plastering it with shot, but will stand a better chance of killing it, and that in a sportsman-like style. It is really easier to kill a bird after watching its flight till it has got about 30 yards away, than to take a snap-shot at about 10 or 15 yards. Thirty yards is a most killing range, for the shot have then spread well and still have tremendous penetration. On several occasions I have known that a man has thought that he had wiped my eye, when I was really waiting for the bird to get away a fair distance. I even doubt whether the culprit realized that he had made a mistake, when the keeper, on coming up with the beaters, kicked the mangled corpse, and remarked

to one of them that it would do for the ferrets.

Though, of course, it is a great object to shoot as accurately as possible, there is really a much larger margin for inaccuracy in shooting with a shot gun than most people believe. A large number of shooters think that if the bird did not come within the pattern as shown by firing the gun at a plate, the bird must be missed. This is to a certain extent true, but the length of the column of shot when it reaches the object aimed at, must also be taken into account.

Taking a distance of 30 yards as an instance, it has been shown that the shot from a cylinder gun at this distance form a column about 20 feet long and 3 feet in diameter. It will thus be seen that if the shot is perfectly timed, the first pellets should catch a crossing bird in the head. The bird may, however, be caught by the middle or even the end of the column. This length of

the column of shot allows a certain margin for inaccuracy of aim, according to the pace at which the bird is flying, and the angle at which it is travelling with regard to the shooter. At a very fast crossing bird, the margin for inaccuracy of aim would probably not be much less than 15 feet.

A good deal may be learned from clay pigeon shooting, as it is now practised in the different shooting clubs and schools near London. In this kind of shooting, however, try to get as much variety in the kinds of shots as possible.

Before concluding my remarks upon shooting, I feel bound to draw the beginner's attention to the way in which he ought to hold his gun. It should always be in such a position that if it goes off, the charge will go up into the air or into the ground. It is no excuse to say that the safety bolt is on, or that there are no cartridges in it, for the man who is in the habit of carrying his gun

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so that it points at his neighbours, even when it is not loaded, will be sure to forget and do so some day when it is loaded, and the safety bolt off. I was taught as a child, never to point a fire-arm of any kind at any one under any circumstances whatever, and this most excellent rule should be instilled into every one. It was so forcibly instilled into me, that when as a boy I was taken to a gun-maker's, I at first refused to present the gun at his eye when he was trying me. Half the gun accidents that happen, occur, not while actually shooting, but through foolishly playing about with fire-arms, and the person who is most surprised at the accident is he who caused it. The rule should be never to point a gun at any one for fun, even when you think that you are quite sure that there is no cartridge in it.

The accompanying illustrations show several common ways of carrying a gun, some of which are very dangerous.

In carrying a gun under your arm, be very careful that you do not get any earth or snow into the muzzle. Many guns have been burst through the muzzle being blocked. Even a slight obstruction at the muzzle will burst a gun.

Another golden rule is, never fire into a hedge, even if you think that there is no one on the other side. It is never safe, for it is always possible that there is some one, and there may be a cow, sheep or dog which you cannot see. The great danger of firing into a hedge was brought forcibly home to me one night, when I found a pellet in the stock of my gun. I knew that a charge of shot which had been fired through a hedge had gone very near me, and had expostulated strongly at the time; but I did not know how near a thing it had been, though I saw where the charge struck the dry ground by the dust it raised. The gun could not have been more than six or seven yards from me

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when it was fired, and as the stock of my gun could not have projected more than three inches behind me, four or five inches would probably have meant a good deal. The closeness of the shooter, and the fact that his barrel was full choke, probably saved me from injury on that particular occasion, but the incident, as I have already said, brought home to me the extreme rashness of shooting into a hedge.

Always take out your cartridges when resting, even for a short time, and never under any circumstances get over a hedge with your gun at full cock. It is best to open the breech, but at any rate put on the safety bolt.

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CHAPTER V

Choosing a Shoot

THERE are several points of great importance to be considered in choosing a shoot. A good mixed shoot is probably the best thing for a man who can only afford to spend a moderate amount on his shooting. He will be able to get what is called a rough shoot at a moderate rent, and with judicious management will be able to improve it considerably in a few years at a small cost. If you intend to try to improve a shoot, you should of course try to get an option to keep it on for a certain number of years. I shall have more to say on this point later on.

One of the best kinds of all-round shoots, that is one which will probably give the most sport, is one where a fair bag of partridges

and pheasants and a good bag of rabbits may be expected during the year. A certain head of other game may also be expected, varying according to the locality.

Since the passing of the Ground Game Act, hares have become practically extinct in many of the agricultural districts, particularly where the holdings are small. In many places where they are really numerous, they are preserved for coursing or hunting. I should, however, in choosing a shoot, always prefer one where a good head of rabbits might be got, to one where there was a certain number of hares. To begin with, rabbits are much more numerous than hares, and secondly, even if an equal number might be expected, rabbits give the better sport. The hare, in spite of the fact that it is such excellent eating, does not give good sport to the shooter.

Where it is possible, an account of the bag for the past two years at least should be got, before deciding upon taking a shoot. Try also

to find out something about the labouring people. I have known of localities where it was almost impossible to preserve, because the whole of the labouring classes in the neighbourhood seemed to combine to poach and otherwise damage the shooting. No rewards or kindnesses seemed to influence their behaviour, the only effect it had was to cause them some amusement. In such a locality, the only way in which game can be preserved is by having a large staff of keepers, and this is of course out of the question for the man of moderate means. It is naturally very difficult to find out such a state of things as this by inquiry, but it should be attempted.

You will probably find on most rough shoots where there are both partridges and pheasants, that one or the other predominates. This is because the ground suitable to one or the other also predominates. You should therefore try to work with nature in improving your shoot and not try to improve the stock

of partridges more than the pheasants on a shoot that is chiefly suited to pheasants, or *vice versâ*.

For pheasants, woods are a necessity, while partridges live in open fields, only going into the woods when they are frightened or driven by stress of weather into doing so. It is therefore comparatively easy to decide in which direction a particular shoot may be most easily developed.

Partridges being birds which spend their lives in fields and not in cover, an open country is necessary for them. The English partridge lives and thrives best in country in which arable land preponderates. The French bird seems to prefer wilder and rougher country. For the comparison between the kinds of ground suitable for the different kinds of partridge shooting, I must refer my reader to Chapter X.*

* See pages 170, 171, 172, 179.

GOOD SHORT COVER IN A ROUGH FIELD

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Beyond the actual rent and the keeper's wages, the expense involved will depend to a great extent on the nature of the shoot. I have known shoots where a good bag of pheasants was obtained by beating on about twelve or thirteen days during the season, and the beating did not cost so much as three or four days' beating on some other shoots where the average day's bag even was not so good. This was because the woods on one shoot did not require more than four or five beaters to work them, while the others wanted about eighteen or twenty. In the one, two or three stop-boys were sufficient, while on the other between twenty and thirty were a necessity.

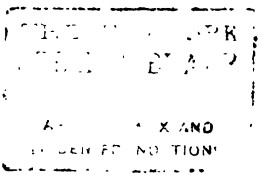
The ideal pheasant shoot for the man of moderate means, is, in my opinion, one where there are a number of long narrow covers distributed over the ground, particularly where the ground slopes, and one compact cover of about ten acres with a stream running

through it near the middle of the shoot. The nearer to this you can get when you choose your shoot, the better. Water seems to be almost a necessity on a pheasant shoot. Pheasants will stay in a cover where there is a stream, they will not do so in a cover where they can get no water.

Where the covers are long and narrow, only a few beaters and stops are required, and so the expense of beating is comparatively little. The one larger cover is a good thing because the birds will in all probability make it their home. Such a shoot as this, will not do so well for partridges, that is to say if the cover is fairly evenly distributed all over the ground. If a covey runs into a wood, it is practically impossible to get it out again without regularly beating the cover. Large rough fields interspersed with arable land, particularly roots, is the best kind of country for partridges.

The larger the cover, so long as it contains water, the more pheasants it will hold, and

GOOD SMALL COVERS FOR PHEASANTS



the better it will hold them. This is an axiom. Unless a large cover is particularly well rided, it will cost more to beat than will please the man of moderate means. Even suppose that the rides are cut in the most scientific manner possible, and with the particular object of being worked with as few beaters as possible, more beaters and stop-boys will be wanted, and so the expense will be greater than in the case of long and narrow covers. It is for this reason that I have advised my reader to choose, if possible, a shoot with covers of the latter nature. He should, however, keep the foregoing axiom in mind, particularly with regard to covers bordering on the shoot the taking of which he is contemplating.

If you find that you are unable to get a shoot on which the covers are of such a shape that they can be beaten by a small number of men, go carefully over what covers there are, and observe how the rides through

them are cut. Rides should be straight and fairly broad. They should be so cut that they divide the wood up into regular sections. A large wood with but few rides in it, and those crooked and ill kept, is almost impossible to beat properly. You should, therefore, in such a case point out to your prospective landlord that, as the cover is useless as it is, and cutting proper rides will improve the value of his property from a sporting point of view, and as cutting rides will put you to considerable expense, it is absolutely necessary to have the option of keeping on the shoot for some years, and suggest that the improvement should be taken into consideration in settling the rent.

It may be advisable to take a shoot on which there are large covers badly rided and where the landlord will not take your proposed improvements into consideration in the matter of reducing the rent, but do not on any account take such a shoot unless you have

A NARROW COVER WITH A STREAM RUNNING THROUGH IT

A COVER OF 150 ACRES WHICH WAS BADLY RIDED AND UNWORKABLE

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a lease which gives you the option of keeping it at the same rent for a sufficient number of years to make it worth your while to make improvements, and always obtain the right to cut a reasonable number of rides. If you take it on a yearly agreement, it is more than possible that some one else will enjoy the fruits of your trouble and expense. These remarks of course do not apply to those who mean to leave things just as they are, and to make no improvements at all.

Cutting the rides will not be so expensive a matter as one would suppose if it is properly managed, but I shall give my reader the best information I can on this point in a subsequent chapter.

The best point of all about a shoot, is its being near where you live. If it is possible get one which is quite close, so that you are able to see to it yourself. This will more than counterbalance many other advantages on a shoot which you are only able to visit occasionally.

Choosing a Shoot

Try if possible to obtain your shooting where the holdings are large. It is a very great disadvantage, as a rule, to have shooting over ground where there are a number of small farms let to different tenants. The best thing of course would be to get a shoot where there was only one farming tenant; this is, however, generally impossible, but try to get as near it as you can.

Be careful about taking a shoot on which you have only part of a large wood. Perhaps I should better express my meaning if I said, take care that when there is a wood on a shoot offered to you that some one else has not got the rights over a portion of it. A market gardener had a small strip of wood, about three acres, which joined a wood of 150 acres over which I had the shooting rights. The market gardener took out a game licence, and had eighty pheasant traps down on the 1st of October. I subsequently heard that he had laid down tracks of raisins from my

cover to his traps. Take advantage, therefore, of another's experience, and where it is possible avoid bad neighbours, particularly when they have a piece of a wood, the rest of which you contemplate taking.

The advantage of water in a cover I have already mentioned, but I must again remind my reader to notice this when he is looking over a shoot. A stream is perhaps the best. That is to say, if it does not run dry in the summer; but there should be water, either stream, pond or lake, in which the pheasants in the cover may go and drink. If they do not find water in the cover in which they are turned out, they will go somewhere else to find it and they may not come back.

Sporting rights belong to the class of property known as "incorporeal," and can only be transferred by writing under seal. Unless otherwise stipulated in the lease, the sporting rights belong, not to the owner of

the land, but to the occupier. It is, therefore, very necessary that you should get a deed under seal, transferring the sporting rights, otherwise you will find that any prosecutions you may be forced to bring against poachers may fall through, as you are not the legal owner of the sporting rights. You might even find yourself being proceeded against by a farming tenant, for shooting over ground for the sporting rights of which you pay rent. The fact that you have no deed under seal, does not affect your landlord's right to the rent agreed upon, even though during your tenancy you had no legal right to kill the game.

In taking a shoot, be careful to protect yourself against claims for damage done by excess of game. I have known of several cases where the shooting tenant has paid the farming tenants on such claims, rather than take the matter into court, and it is not an uncommon thing for the farmer to request

the shooting tenant to put wire netting round certain parts of his covers. Such things as these should be guarded against, for it is obviously unfair for the shooting tenant to have to spend money beyond that which has been agreed upon, to prevent what it has been his main object to produce—an excess of game. The greatest trouble in this respect is likely to be caused by rabbits.

The larger the acreage of the shoot, the less per acre you will probably have to pay for it, that is to say in shootings of the same class. It is very difficult to make any definite statement as to what is a fair rent for rough, or comparatively rough shooting, which could be worked up into something really good. The rent will be influenced by various circumstances. Anything near a large town, is of course more expensive than away from everywhere. As a rule, too, a shoot near a town is more expensive to run in anything like a successful manner. I have known of shoots

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which yielded very fair sport, let for 6*d* per acre, and I have known of much worse ones let easily at a rate of 2*s* 6*d* per acre.

CHAPTER VI

The General Management of a Shoot

HOW to manage a shoot properly is just as important a consideration as how to choose one.

The first point to be decided is whether a keeper is or is not necessary. While it is not possible to give such advice as will be applicable to every case, I hope to be able to give such general information as will enable my reader to decide on the best course to pursue in most individual cases.

When there is obviously not enough work on the shoot to employ a man's time properly, some arrangement may often be made with a small tenant or labourer living on the spot, by which for a small weekly or monthly

wage, he undertakes to devote a part of his time to looking after the shooting. In small shoots, where no birds, or only a very few, are reared, such a plan is generally advisable.

A judicious offer of rewards to the small tenants and labourers, will help the successful working of this plan. The people who can do the most harm to a shoot are those who are always on the spot, so no pains should be spared in making friends with them. A man who is working in the fields all day is sure to come across nests, and if he is on bad terms with the owner of the shooting, their destruction will give him no trouble, and involve him in no risk.

If, however, a small reward is offered to those who find nests, such cases ought to be rare. The rewards should be offered in a judicious way. A shilling, eighteen pence, or two shillings for instance, should be given to those who show a nest to the owner of the shooting or his representative, and

another shilling or eighteen pence if the bird rears her brood successfully.

It will generally be found that labourers prefer to get two shillings for a nest in a legitimate way, particularly if they see a probable chance of obtaining another shilling or eighteen pence, than to run a risk and get half-a-crown by selling the eggs to some one else. An occasional rabbit during the season will work wonders in making the people willing to work in the interest of the shooter, and this added to a judicious reward will amply repay one in the long run. The working classes in the country, as a rule, esteem the present of a couple of rabbits very highly.

In some cases it is not even necessary to employ a man even for a part of his time. On a shoot, for instance, where there is but little game but partridges, the rewarding plan will sometimes be found sufficient. An additional reward on results will be advisable, however, in order to induce the labourers and small

tenants to keep down the vermin. Of course one sometimes comes across a district where the natives cannot be induced to help in protecting the game or even to leave things alone by any reward which it is worth while to offer them, and then it is absolutely necessary to employ a man either entirely or partially according to circumstances.

If there is more work to do on a shoot than can be done by a man who has other work, employ a young man. If possible get one who has been under-keeper on some large shoot, or has had some experience of the work. At any rate let him be young, for it is then possible that he will not be quite sure that he knows more about everything connected with shooting than any one else living, and will not try to evade orders which are not quite in accord with what he has seen before.

Another advantage about the young keeper is, that as it will very probably be his first independent place, he will not object to work

which an old keeper would be likely to consider as being outside his proper duties. Thus he will not think it beneath his dignity to cut rides or do other work of a similar nature. If properly directed and instructed, an intelligent young man can do as well as a man with much greater experience, and he will do work that does not, strictly speaking, come within the duties of a keeper. He is more capable of hard work than an older man, he is keener about it, and last but not least, he does not expect such high wages.

Wages differ a little in different parts of the country, and according to circumstances. For bare wages a young keeper generally gets from 16*s* to £1 a week. If he is married and is given a cottage, this must be considered in deciding upon the wages, if the cottage has to be rented for the purpose. If he is a bachelor, he will very likely refuse a cottage, and board out with a family. This, of course, puts him to more expense in living. It is

also usual in some places to give the keeper a new suit every year, and a certain amount of firewood if he has a cottage. If a young man is employed as I have advised, his wages and allowances should never average more than £1 a week. It is generally advisable, if a keeper has done well, to give him a handsome present at Christmas, say £2, £3, or even £5, and to point out that it is given because you are pleased with the results of his work. I have also found that a present of old clothes is generally acceptable.

The really good keeper is born and not made. The greater part of his work should be a pleasure to him, and he should do the rest because he cannot be comfortable unless he knows that everything on the shoot is going well. He should enjoy a day's shooting, whether he shoots himself or not on that particular occasion, as much as the man who pays to get it. His chief fault ought to be that he is disgusted at bad shooting, because

in this case the game is allowed to escape, or is so riddled with shot as to be useless. He will also probably show a tendency to arrange things so that only easy shots are given, and will not like to put up birds so that they must fly high before they come to the guns. He does this because he wants to be able to show a good bag at the end of the day, and does not approve of making difficult shots out of birds that can be made to give easy ones. These faults are on the right side, and are caused simply by zeal. They are easy to correct, but the keeper who does not like his work, is as bad as the dog which is gun-shy.

Different keepers have different ways of dealing with poachers, but the best keeper is he who will prevent poaching by some other means than having the delinquents up before the magistrates. I knew of one, who, when he had good evidence that a man had been poaching, went and picked a quarrel with him

about some trivial matter and gave him a good thrashing. The culprit knew well enough what the punishment was for, and poaching on that shoot was, after a short time, practically unknown. It is not given to every man, however, to be able to beat his fellows, so this plan of stopping poaching is not likely to become general, but having the delinquent up before the Bench should be the last resort.

It is very disheartening, if, on catching a man red-handed, and knowing that he has had a lot of game off your shoot, the Bench fines him 5*s*, which he pays at once and goes off laughing.

A rough knowledge of the different degrees of poaching as recognized by law, may be of use to those who have shoots of their own.

In the case of a single person who trespasses in pursuit of game in the daytime, the only legal redress is a summons before the justices, unless the offender refuses to give his name and

address, when he may be arrested. He must, however, be brought before a magistrate within twelve hours. The offence is punishable by a fine only, though if the fine cannot be paid, the poacher is liable to imprisonment.

If the offence be committed in a rabbit warren, a decoy, or in a place where wild-fowl are kept, it becomes a larceny, and is punished as such.

Poaching at night, particularly if the poacher is armed, is a much more serious offence in the eyes of the law. The maximum punishment is three months' hard labour for the first offence. If, however, any violence is used against the owner, occupier, or keeper, the offender is liable to seven years' penal servitude. If two or more persons poach at night, and are armed, they are liable to fourteen years' penal servitude.

The following case illustrates the way in which these excellent laws are enforced on most occasions. I remember it well: Three

out of five poachers were caught at night in the act of netting a field. They were armed, and fought hard, knocking about one of the men who helped to catch them severely. One of the men had been convicted on many previous occasions, and he received the severest sentence of the three who were caught. He was given one month's hard labour.

It will therefore be seen, that should your keeper find that he is unable to stop a certain poacher by himself, there are two courses open to you. When the poacher is caught you can proceed against him at law, or you can deal with him yourself. The latter course is illegal, but it has points in its favour which recommend it to some people. My advice is to avoid taking a poaching case into court if possible. A poacher is not likely to want to take you into court, even in these days.

If a knowledge of the legal and other remedies against poaching is likely to be of use to the owner of a shoot, I am sure that

knowing about some of the methods of poachers and the best ways of stopping them will also be of value to him.

On open ground, such as a field in which partridges lie at night, or one frequented at night by rabbits, netting by a party of men is a common way of poaching in some parts of the country. This may to a great extent be made impossible, by a judicious planting of gorse bushes and stakes. Even laying down bundles of thorns, furze or brambles at frequent intervals, will make the poachers' task impracticable, and will tear their nets if they try. As these nets are very expensive, being sometimes made of silk, poachers are not at all likely to attempt to net a field which is well bushed or staked, and if they are foolish enough to try it once they will not do so again.

Pheasants are generally poached at night when they are roosting. This, of course, necessitates the keeper's going round the shoot at night. He should not go at any regular time

or on particular nights, neither must he travel over the same route on each occasion. This kind of poaching will most likely be tried by a local man if it is done at all, and he will, of course, make it his business to know as much as possible of the keeper's movements.

Pheasants' and partridges' eggs are always a marketable commodity, so they are naturally very liable to be stolen. The judicious offer of rewards, as I have already advised, will to a great extent prevent this. Do not, however, if you are rearing some birds, give the reward unless you or your keeper are shown the nest with the eggs in it. If you give the reward to any one who brings you the eggs, you will probably be buying eggs stolen from your neighbour's shoot, or buying eggs from your own shoot which might have been better left to the mother.

Young pheasants can often be disposed of fairly easily, so if you rear any, take care to protect them. The coops should, if possible,

be near the keeper's cottage, and a dog should be kept fastened up near them, if there is any suspicion that there is a chance of their being stolen. The best way of fastening the dog is by a chain which runs freely along a wire fixed to posts slightly above the level of the ground. The wire should be arranged so that the dog has a good range, and can protect a considerable space of ground.

Narcotics are also used by poachers. The drug is given to the birds with grain, and renders their capture easy. I have also heard of spirits being used in this way.

Rabbits are taken in many ways. Ferrets and nets, wires and other devices, are used both by day and night. Wiring is particularly difficult to prevent unless you are on particularly good terms with the farming tenants, as the farmer has a right to destroy rabbits and generally does so by means of wires.

The most important factor in preventing poaching is a good keeper, and he should be

thoroughly posted in the limits of his legal action. Though a farming tenant has a right to kill hares and rabbits under the Ground Game Act, there are certain restrictions as to what he may do in this way. He is allowed to kill them himself by wiring, shooting, and certain kinds of traps, but he is not allowed to poison them, or to ask other people to come and help him kill them. He may depute a servant to kill rabbits for him, but this authority must be given in writing, and in giving it he forfeits his own right for so long as his servant is killing them for him.

Thus it will be seen that the right of the tenant in occupation to kill ground game, lies in one person only, and does not give such a right to more than one person on each separate holding.

Many writers say that the local poacher is a type of man easily recognized. They see no difficulty in finding out who the poacher is, as his appearance, in their opinion, gives

him away. Their only difficulty is catching the poacher red-handed.

Now this type of poacher certainly exists, but he is not the kind who really does the most harm to a shoot. He is rather a "moucher" than a proper poacher. He frequents public-houses whenever he has any money, or when he thinks that there is a chance of picking up a drink. As he is well known to all the neighbouring keepers and is anything but a sober man, he is not so much to be feared as another type of poacher who is found in some parts of the country. This other type is as a rule a sober hard-working man, whom one would take to be the last person to be suspected of poaching. Unlike the poacher of fiction, he is never found loafing about in suspicious places with a dog, he is clean and neatly dressed, is always civil, and far from having a hang-dog appearance, looks you straight in the face in a perfectly frank but respectful manner.

From this man considerable harm will be sustained. He generally has only one confederate, if he has any at all, and will go on making a small but certain income for years without being found out.

In places comparatively near large towns, gangs of poachers sometimes come with the intention of sweeping off all the game. If any suspicion of such an event be entertained, arrangements should be made between the neighbouring owners of shootings if possible, for the gang is not at all likely to confine its attentions to the ground of one man only. The great thing is to make sure that you have a larger force than that of the poachers, for those who go in gangs are often fairly desperate, and will not stick at trifles in their attempts to get off. As these gangs often work with nets, bushing and staking fields, as I have advised before, is a most important precaution in localities where there is any chance of a gang of poachers coming to visit the shoot.

There are a good many people who do a little occasional poaching: indeed in some parts of the country these occasional poachers will clear off the whole stock of game if they come in any numbers. Among the worst of these are hop-pickers. In some parts of Kent and Sussex hardly any preserving is done, as the work and expense of the whole year are destroyed in a few days by the hop-pickers. Harvesters are an almost extinct class nowadays, but they are still to be found in some parts of the country. Many of them come over by boat from Ireland, and all of them, at least all I have come across, seem to be worse if anything than the average hop-picker. Both hop-pickers and harvesters will often clear off, not only all the game, but also every trout in any stream which happens to be near the place in which they are working. This they do by damming up the stream in a narrow place just above a pool, bailing out most of the water which will not

run out, and then picking up the trout from the bottom.

One of the men who does the most harm to a shoot, and unfortunately a common one, is the small dealer who buys the game from any one who will sell it to him. As a rule there are one or two of these men who visit every village where there is any game. They are particularly anxious to buy rabbits, as there is practically no risk about this. Keepers are sometimes tempted to deal with these men, and I have known of some who have fallen. Small publicans also at times act as receivers of game. In every case rabbits and hares are the favourites both with this kind of dealer and with the poacher who makes a business of it, as there is so little risk about it. With other game, poaching might be to a great extent stopped, if the magistrates would only act up to their full power in the right direction. If licences to sell game were only granted on condition that the seller kept a register

stating where the game which he sold was obtained, there would be such a check put upon poaching, that game preservation would be made more easy and much cheaper. As the facilities for disposing of poached game were taken away, poaching would decrease, and the poacher would have no object in taking more than he and his family could eat themselves.

In the autumn a certain number of village people will go into the woods, perhaps asking leave to do so if they think that there is any chance of getting it, but going all the same. They go to pick up acorns, which are in great demand in some places as food for pigs, and no doubt the acorns are the prime object. If left undisturbed, however, as the good-natured man will wish to leave them, it is ten to one that he will find that the temptation to poach has been too strong for them, and that they have repaid his kindness by killing some of his game. Trespassers after nuts,

blackberries, sloes, &c., in the autumn, should all be looked upon with suspicion, and good-natured permissions to go in search of them will most likely result in a great deal of wanton damage to trees and bushes, and very possibly in some snaring of game.

People who trespass after flowers in the spring are generally looked upon as a harmless class, but they will very likely disturb pheasants or partridges on their nests, and seeking flowers may only be another name for egg-hunting.

My reader will by now have realized that there is a good deal for the conscientious keeper to do; but besides human enemies, he has a great many four-footed and winged enemies. These I shall deal with in another chapter.

I must here point out that the more a man is on his shoot, out of the shooting season, the better he is likely to succeed. The man who lives on his shoot will do best, as he will be

able to become acquainted with and make friends of most of the people living on the spot. Keeping up a small shoot on a little money, is quite a different thing to a big shoot which costs a great deal. In the latter case, it is perhaps better to leave things to a trustworthy head-keeper, but with only one keeper, and a young one, it is best to devote as much time to looking after the shoot as can be spared. After all, half the pleasure which may be got out of a shoot is lost, by leaving everything, except the actual killing of the game, to others.

CHAPTER VII

The General Management of a Shoot

(Continued)

THE cutting of rides is a matter that requires a considerable amount of judgment, and entails a good deal of work, both originally in cutting them and subsequently in keeping them in good order.

A large cover is practically unworkable unless it is well rided. It should be so divided up by the rides, that beating can be done with as few men as possible, and the game kept under control as much as possible during the beating. It is, therefore, best to have the rides straight and as broad as you can consistently with the size of the cover. Try as much as possible to cut a cover up into long strips, which can all be beaten so as to drive

the game into a last piece with a nice corner at the end of it. Do not forget in planning your rides, that you cannot get pheasants to run up a hill. If you try to make them do so, you will find that a large proportion of them will break back.

If your cover is large, you will have to arrange for several of these corners as ends to each series of beats. Very long series of beats without a proper corner are bad, both because they give the game more chances of running back on to the pieces which have already been beaten, and because they are tiring and annoying to the guns. It is much pleasanter to have fewer birds on several occasions, than to get them all into the same space of time on one occasion. Therefore, never, if you can avoid it, have more than two or three beats without a corner, from which all the birds in them must get up.

The most important thing, in the first place, is to have the rides straight. The more of

a ride you can keep in view at the same time the better, and it is as easy to divide the cover up into workable strips by cutting straight as crooked rides. The only difficulty is when there are large trees in the cover, for it is, of course, not to be expected that you will be allowed to cut these down. Try, therefore, to make your plans so that a large tree will not be in the middle of a proposed ride.

In the actual cutting and keeping of a ride, there is a right way and a wrong way. Each individual tree or bush on either side of the ride should be trimmed off so that it is rounded at the sides and towards the top. The illustration at the beginning of the book shows a well kept ride. The ride illustrated is straight, and the trees and bushes on either side are rounded off nicely. When the ride is once in proper order, it does not require so much work to keep it so, it is only in the cutting of it that the really hard work comes in. It is obvious that crooked rides, with branches overhanging

and projecting into them, are not of much use in shooting a cover.

For some time before the pheasants begin to lay, the keeper will have very little to do, and it is then that he should devote a large part of his time to cutting and trimming rides. He will again have spare time when the birds are turned down, to trim them up again before the shooting is in full swing.

If, for two or three years after being cut, a part of the cover is particularly bare of undergrowth, it is sometimes advisable to plant some rape or buck-wheat in places where it is particularly bare. Both pheasants and partridges are very fond of these, and they will therefore be induced to stay at home.

The extra expenses connected with keeping up a shoot, apart from rearing birds, should not be very heavy if things are properly managed. Beaters are paid from about 2*s* to 2*s* 6*d* a day, and stop-boys 1*s*. They are also given a lunch of bread and cheese and beer for the men

and perhaps ginger-beer for the boys. If it is not convenient to supply the lunch through your keeper, an arrangement can generally be made with the local publican, who should be able to supply the lunch and beer for an inclusive charge of 9*d* a head for the men and 6*d* a head for the boys. This is about the maximum of what should be charged, and should include taking the lunch to any given point within reasonable distance.

It may be necessary, at first particularly, for the keeper to have some help in cutting and clearing rides. You should be able to get a man to do this at 2*s* to 2*s* 6*d* a day. It is as a rule best to have outside men working immediately under the keeper's eye, if you do not it is very probable that a considerable time will elapse before your rides are cut. I once had doubts in a certain case of ride cutting as to whether the men were working properly, so I spent a day cutting a similar ride myself. I found that though I was quite new to the

work, I got through more wood in a day than the two men I was employing did in two days.

If your keeper is married, it is as a rule wise to give him a cottage. This is, of course, taken into consideration in settling upon what wages you are to pay him. The cottage will, however, probably be obtained at a very small rent, if it is not included in the shoot. A married man is in many ways more satisfactory than a single man. To begin with, the single man will very likely be obliged to board out with some family, and then it is quite possible that all his movements will be published to the neighbourhood.

Vermin-traps form but a very small item in the year's expense. Good ones can be bought from about 10*s* a dozen. It is well not to stint your keeper as to the number of traps you let him have: the more he can keep in work the better for the shoot.

An important part of the keeper's duties is making the pheasants stay at home. In the

case of the wild birds this is best done by putting down food in judiciously chosen places in the covers. Choose the centres of the largest covers and those in which there is water, and open glades where there is undergrowth if possible.

Maize is the cheapest form of food to put down in this way, but it is best to begin with corn in the straw. Wheat, barley, and oats are all good, though I am inclined to think that wheat is by far the best. When there is a certain amount of straw collected, the maize should be scattered amongst it, and more corn in the straw given when the former straw has got trodden in and sodden. The object of doing this is that the pheasants have to hunt for the grain among the straw, which keeps them occupied and amused for a considerable time. They thus are kept at home better than if they were able to get a full meal in a short space of time. It also gives all the birds a better chance of getting a fair share of the food.

White peas are excellent food for pheasants, and some should be given occasionally with the maize.

Though the major part of the food should be put in comparatively small areas in the centre of the covers, tracks of more sparsely scattered food and straw should be put along the rides leading to the feeding centres, particularly about August and September when the birds have not yet become accustomed to look for their food in particular spots.

Feeding in this way should be continued throughout the year to some extent, though of course so much food is not necessary in the summer as in the winter and early spring. I, of course, exclude the time following the turning down of the artificially reared birds. It is most important that the feeding should be continued throughout January, February and March liberally, for on this the stock of wild birds will to a great extent depend. If the birds do not find food at home at the time when

they are inclined to stray, they will go somewhere where they can find it.

A most important point about feeding, is that it should be done at regular hours. This remark is specially applicable to the birds which have been artificially reared and turned down.

Do not feed in a cover frequented by chickens; you will be making the chicken farmer a present of the food.

If you have a cover in which the soil is heavy, you should provide dusting places for the birds by putting sand in suitable spots. Pheasants are very fond of dusting themselves.

Another important thing, is that the keeper should drive in the young pheasants from the outlying hedges and spinneys in the evening, when they have got old enough to begin to stray. This applies particularly to the artificially reared birds. He should go round with a steady old dog, and work all the hedges in towards the covers. This will save

most of the birds which show a tendency to stray from leaving you and going to your neighbour's covers.

My reader must forgive me for again referring to the necessity of keeping on good terms with the farming tenants and labourers, but this point in the management of a shoot is of such importance, that it is much more easy to say too little than too much about it.

Sometimes when you hear a man complain that the farmers on his shoot are a surly lot, and he wishes he had to deal with men like the farmers on so-and-so's shoot, on closely observing what he does you will see enough to account for the apparent surliness of the farmers. All the gates are left open, even when there are cattle or sheep in the field which has just been quitted; partridges are walked up and hedges hunted for rabbits when there are cattle or sheep in the field or close to the hedges. Of course where there are very large fields, it is possible to walk up partridges where

there are cattle without annoying the farmer, but in the case of small fields, the farmers are very likely to think that the dogs disturb the cattle, even if they do not chase them, and the same with regard to the shooting, though they may be neither peppered nor excited. You should therefore find out the farmers' feelings on this point, before shooting in fields where you can hardly be out of gun-shot of cattle, or where your dogs will be so close as to fidget them.

Such apparently little points as these, may make a great difference in the relations between the sporting and farming tenant, and one cannot be surprised that the farmer has not particularly kindly feelings towards the man who lets his cattle stray from the field into which they have been put. Therefore, whenever you open a gate, make a point of seeing that it is shut again afterwards.

Try to keep on the right side of the farmers by asking them to come and shoot rabbits with

you, or by any other little compliment of a similar nature. Always employ, or tell your keeper to employ, the farm labourers on your shoot in preference to any others for beating or other jobs. A little tact and a little knowledge of human nature will go a long way in making the farmers and work-people friendly and ready to help you, while a little thoughtlessness and carelessness will make them your enemies. In the case of a large shoot with plenty of keepers, this point in the management falls upon the head-keeper, but in the case of a small shoot which is to be maintained cheaply, it falls upon the shooting tenant as well as upon the keeper. Sometimes it is impossible for the most tactful man to keep on friendly terms with a particular labourer or even small tenant, but the attempt should always be made.

Try, if possible, when shooting to work from the outside towards the centre of your shoot, and do not disturb the centre more than you

can help. At any rate, when you drive or beat, try to do so in such a way that the birds will fly to another part of your ground rather than to somebody else's. I shall have more to say on this point in a subsequent chapter.

Rabbits are more likely to be the cause of ill-feeling between the farming and shooting tenant than anything else. I have never heard of any really serious complaints from farmers about there being too large a head of birds on or near their land, but they all object to being over-rabbited. Very often this complaint is only too just, so it is wise to meet the farmer on this point to the best of your ability. Keep the rabbits well down where they are likely to do real harm, for there are sure to be some parts of your shoot where they can be kept up in considerable numbers without doing any noticeable damage. Rabbits do not habitually travel very far from their homes unless there is plenty of cover for them. This is particularly noticeable when a field is planted

with corn, or allowed to run to hay, at the edge of a cover containing rabbit-burrows. In such a case it will be found that the rabbits, as a rule, only eat the grass or corn for a few yards from the edge of the cover, but for this distance they will eat it down as though it had been cut with a mowing-machine. This is only true, however, in the case of an ordinary head of rabbits. I have known instances of so large a stock that whole fields which had been left for hay have been eaten down close.

CHAPTER VIII

Four-Footed and Winged Enemies

BESIDES human poachers, there are a good many four-footed and winged ones, which will give the keeper a great deal of work. This part of his duty never ends, though it may become lighter as he gets the vermin well under. Any slackness on his part will, however, shortly result in a renewal of the nuisance.

Some of my hunting friends would have me believe that foxes do no harm, to the birds at any rate, on a shoot. It is probable that they may do comparatively little harm to the birds during the shooting season, particularly if there is a good stock of rabbits about; but during the nesting season, it would be difficult to estimate the damage done among the pheasants

and partridges by even one fox. I have known of five sitting birds being killed by one fox in an area of about sixty acres in one week. Both pheasants and partridges often nest in hedges and similar places, and when they are sitting, probably are about the easiest prey possible. In the shooting season the fox finds that rabbits and rats are more easy to catch; but it is during the nesting season, which is apparently the time of year when the fox-hunter knows but little of the habits of the fox, that most of the harm is done.

Many different means of keeping foxes away from nesting birds have been practised by keepers, with more or less success. Gas-tar dabbed on bushes, and rags steeped in the same placed at close intervals round the nest, will sometimes keep a fox away; but I have known one take a sitting pheasant from a hedge which literally reeked of gas-tar. He even came back again for the eggs. There are some patent preparations, made to be used in

much the same way as gas-tar, which have also met with a good deal of success. The only way of which I have heard of making the bird perfectly safe, is to lay a length of old chain completely round the nest at a distance of about ten yards from it. The chain should be handled every day, and the fox will then never cross it. The objection to this method of keeping off foxes is the difficulty of obtaining a sufficient quantity of old chain—new chain being too expensive to use in this way.

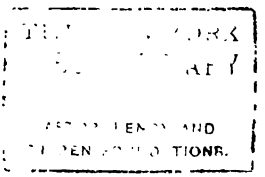
Of all the four-footed vermin on a shoot, cats and rats probably do the most harm. Cats will kill every kind of game, but fortunately they are very easily trapped as a rule. Rats destroy large quantities of eggs and young birds; and as I have known them kill a sitting hen, I have no doubt that they might sometimes kill a sitting pheasant or partridge, they are very cautious, and are, therefore, rather difficult to trap. Common rats often make their abodes in the banks of streams and

ponds, where they will kill young wild duck. They seem to be just as much at home in the water as on land. The true water-rat is supposed to be purely herbivorous.

For all-round work, there is no trap which as far as I know comes up to the old-fashioned steel gin or rat-trap—the pattern known as the "Dorset" being the handiest. It may be used in various sizes for different vermin, both four-footed and winged. It should always be attached by a chain to a strong staple in a tree, or to a stout and long peg driven into the ground, so that but little of it projects. The trap itself and the chain should be well concealed. The approach to it should be enclosed with brushwood, and the trap covered with fine brush, grass, sand, &c., always making sure that in brushing over the trap you do not interfere with its action.

Cats are best baited for with stale fish or meat sprinkled with valerian, and the trap should be set against a tree. Sometimes a cat will

THE END OF A RAT



give up civilization and take to the woods. These cats seem to grow to a larger size than is usual, and get a magnificent coat. I have shot a cat which was known to have lived in and around a certain large cover for at least eighteen months, and it was as different as possible in appearance to the ordinary domestic animal. Its coat was very fine—not the fineness of the Persian cat, but very thick and much longer than that of the ordinary cat. All the markings of the coat seemed to have toned down, so that it was very difficult to see it in the cover. It was very large, and its muscles were as hard as steel. I have seen several other cats which had run wild, and they all had a somewhat similar appearance; but the particular one to which I have referred, had probably lived wild for longer than any of them. I am sure that it had been living in the woods for much longer than eighteen months, but I could not hear of it in our part of the country before that. These wild or semi-wild cats are

much more difficult to trap than the tame cat that poaches and goes home again. Most of those of whose deaths I have heard have been shot.

Rats may sometimes be destroyed wholesale. The best way to do this is to put food of some kind, preferably grain, in an enclosed place, giving the rats free access to it. When they take it regularly, poison the food with strychnine or some other irritant poison in fairly large doses. Great care must be taken in using poison, to do so only in an enclosed space, otherwise dogs, foxes, and game may suffer. Even if a large number of rats are destroyed in this way, a constant crusade must still be kept up against them. They must be trapped and ferreted throughout the year. Traps must be set with particular care, and it is best to set them in the morning, as then the smell left by the hand will go off to some extent. In any case, handle the trap as little as possible. Some people always use

gloves when setting rat-traps with this object in view.

Stoats and weasels are perhaps more pursued than any other kinds of vermin. It is, of course, necessary to keep them down as they do a great deal of harm, particularly in killing rabbits, young partridges and pheasants, and destroying eggs. They do not do as much harm, however, as rats, though they receive much more attention than is bestowed upon these animals, in fact, they possess one good point in that they kill a number of rats. They are easily trapped, particularly in the late spring and early summer, when the female takes out her family to hunt. The trap is generally set, unbaited, in a hole in a wall or bank. If the mother is caught, all her family are caught easily in a short time. Stoats are very fond of the water, sometimes being almost amphibious. They are therefore much to be feared where young wild duck are being reared.

Hedgehogs do a great deal of harm by

stealing eggs. They will take them from under the sitting bird, and will clear a nest completely in a couple of nights. They are easily caught in a trap baited with an egg.

Among the worst of the winged enemies of game is the sparrow-hawk. It will kill large numbers of young pheasants, and will sometimes kill even a full-grown partridge. As both the male and female will frequently return to the nest after the breeding season, it is as well to leave a trap there all the year round. In setting a trap for a hawk, bait with a freshly killed bird, and put the trap on a post or somewhere where the bird is likely to alight.

Kestrels do not, as a rule, do much harm. They will, however, sometimes kill young birds.

You should tell your keeper, that if he can catch hawks alive, he will be able to sell them at a good price. He must, however, be careful not to injure the feathers, as this detracts greatly from the value of the bird.

Fortunately, neither the sparrow-hawk nor the kestrel are really common, but there are other birds that do a great deal of harm to game which are very common indeed. There are a great many people who publish the wildest statements with regard to the harmlessness of the jay. I am strongly against the wanton destruction of any wild birds, but those who take upon themselves the defence of all of them, and make use of palpably absurd statements as to their habits, in their arguments, are likely to do the cause of wild bird protection more harm than good. The mere fact that the way to catch a jay is to bait a trap with an egg, is sufficient argument on the other side. The trap should be arranged in the fork of a tree. A turf is put in the fork, to make a platform to receive the trap and bait. The egg which is used as bait, should be put against the thickest branch of the fork, and the trap in front of it. The trap must be well concealed, and so arranged that the bird will alight on it

when it comes to take the egg. All traps for winged vermin should, when possible, be set in this way, as it is not then likely that a pheasant will be caught in it, as would happen were it set on the ground.

Rooks, crows and jackdaws, do a great deal of harm in the way of destroying eggs. These three and the jay will also kill young birds, though the latter is not so bad an offender as are the three former. I have, however, known of a jay being caught in a trap baited with a young dead pheasant.

The magpie is also a great egg stealer, but I have never heard of one killing a young bird.

Brown owls will kill off large numbers of young pheasants, but the barn owl will not, I believe, do so.

The birds against which constant watch must be kept, as being common they do great damage, are jays, crows, rooks, magpies and jackdaws. The hawks not being so common, therefore do not do so much

harm. The sparrow-hawk must, however, be destroyed if possible. Eggs are the best bait for jays, magpies and rooks, and a dead chick for crows and jackdaws. When the trap is ineffectual, eggs poisoned with strychnine may be used.

Dogs can hardly be called vermin, but stray dogs will do a great deal of damage to a shoot, particularly in the nesting season. Another way in which dogs do harm is, when they are taken along public footpaths which traverse a shoot. They may be allowed to run about on either side, and disturb a sitting bird in a moment. Such a disturbance is likely to cause the bird to desert her nest for good, particularly if she is still laying, or only just beginning to sit. It is best to deal summarily with the stray dog which goes hunting on its own account, for a dog which does this, will probably never be cured of it. I must point out, however, that no one has a *legal* right to shoot a dog which he finds hunting on

his preserves. His legal remedy is to summon the owner of the dog for any damage it may have done. The dog which is taken along the public footpath, is more difficult to deal with. An explanation of the harm it does and a request to the owner is very often all that is necessary.

Always insist on your keeper trapping rather than shooting vermin. There is no reason for a keeper to carry a gun habitually, as he should depend entirely on his traps, and shooting, even at vermin, is not advisable at all seasons.

CHAPTER IX

Pheasant Shooting

IN order to arrange pheasant shoots successfully, it is necessary to know something of the habits of the bird.

You will find on almost every shoot that the pheasants, when disturbed in a particular wood, will generally tend to fly in a certain direction towards another cover. This habit will be influenced, however, by various circumstances. For instance, pheasants will not, as a rule, try to fly against a very strong wind, neither will they fly over a spot where they know that there is a human being if they can avoid it. I shall refer to these points again later on.

As a rule pheasants, when undisturbed, go out into the open fields to feed early in the

morning and again soon after mid-day. This is particularly the case early in the season. Sometimes, when there are berries, they will stray about in the hedges all day, frequenting principally those in which there are blackberries, as they are very fond of them. They may thus stray a long way from the covers. They often go to feed among the roots and in rough fields, particularly if there be such fields near the cover in which they live. This they do chiefly in the early morning and at about two o'clock in the afternoon, but in bright sunny weather they sometimes lie out nearly all day.

When pursued in cover, pheasants will not run uphill if they can avoid doing so, but double back; and, whether they are in cover, hedges or fields, they always seem to prefer to get away by running rather than by flying. They fly to avoid their enemies only when they are surprised or see that they have no other means of escape. Though they roost

in trees, pheasants are essentially ground birds in their habits.

Apart from beating, the best sport to be got out of pheasant shooting is by hunting the hedges and fields containing cover, with spaniels. This is difficult to manage alone, as the birds may break on either side of a hedge; it is best, therefore, to hunt these with a gun on either side. Except in short-cut cover, there is not much good to be done by two or three shooters going after pheasants, unless the covers be very narrow so that they may be hunted up by spaniels.

In hunting hedges with dogs, always work away from a cover; if you work towards it, the birds are pretty sure to run in. Pheasants can run very rapidly indeed, so that unless they are being driven in a contrary direction to the one in which they wish to go, or to a gap in a hedge where they will have to cross the open, there is not a very good chance of the dogs flushing them. Do not

walk too close to a hedge, you will get a much better shot at a bird breaking out if you are at some distance from it.

Spaniels are the best dogs to use in this kind of shooting, as they will bustle the birds up and flush them in a way no other dogs will do. Pointers or setters are no good for this kind of shooting. The great difficulty with spaniels is to keep them sufficiently steady. They must not work on too far ahead, or chase rabbits if they break out of cover. A good spaniel should retrieve, but he should not run in when a gun is fired until he is told to do so. This is one of the most difficult things to teach a spaniel.

The worst of this kind of shooting is, that the birds as a rule give only the easiest shots. It is, however, very often advisable to shoot round the outlying hedges, particularly if you have only one keeper. He will, unless the shoot is a very small one, not be able to drive in the birds from all the hedges in the evening,

so that by hunting them judiciously, you may very likely secure a good many birds which would otherwise have been sure to stray off your shoot for good.

In walking over a field which contains cover such as roots, heather, bracken, &c., if there are two or three guns walking at a certain distance apart, always make the dogs work well between the guns as well as on either side. It is astonishing how close birds will sometimes lie if the cover is too short for them to run without showing themselves.

If you find that the birds in a particular hedge or field always fly off your ground if you approach them working away from your nearest cover, give up working in this direction. If they are driven off your ground several times and thoroughly frightened by being shot at, they will most likely stay away altogether. It may be possible to get them out of the hedges by putting a stop-boy at some gap between you and the cover, but if you cannot

do this, content yourself with chancing their running into your own cover; it will assist the keeper, and the birds will be kept at home for you to shoot when you beat the covers.

Beating for pheasants is an art in itself, and experience will teach more than can be told in any book. I may, however, hope to be able to give my reader some hints which will assist him in his first endeavours.

There are two ways of arranging a beat. It may be arranged so as to give practically no difficult shots, and it may be so arranged that nearly all the shots are sporting ones. The keeper will probably prefer the former method, for he wants to show as big a bag at the end of the day as possible, but the latter method will recommend itself to the man who shoots rather for the sport than with the object of killing as many birds as possible.

The first thing to find out in arranging a beat is, which way will the majority of the birds fly, all things being equal, when each different

part of the cover is beaten. It is better to put the birds up, if possible, so that they are encouraged to fly in the direction they are inclined to. They may of course be driven, more or less, in a direction they do not wish to take; but they will not as a rule fly so well under these circumstances, and many more stop-boys and even beaters are required. It is for this reason that I advise my reader to find out which way the birds, or the majority of them, wish to fly when they are put up in every cover or portion of a cover. He will then be able to arrange his beats in the most satisfactory manner possible. Even suppose that he finds it necessary to beat a cover in such a way as to force the birds in a contrary direction to the one in which they wish to go, he will be able to get a better result, and that with fewer men and boys, than would be the case if he had to guess the directions in which the birds were likely to fly.

Remembering the habit of running to which

I have already referred, my reader will realize that one of the difficulties in beating a cover is to make the birds get up well. A pheasant will not rise higher than he need, just as he will not rise at all if he can escape by running. If you want good sporting shots, therefore, try to make the birds go over some fairly high trees if possible, shortly before they come to the guns. The same result can be obtained by beating, so as to drive the birds across a low-lying piece of ground, between two covers on either side of it. In this case the guns should be placed in the hollow.

It is sometimes advisable to beat so as to make the birds fly in an opposite direction to the way they wish to, if this way is off your ground. This is achieved principally by a judicious placing of stops.

The stop-boys should be placed first of all in the hedges running directly out of the cover to be beaten. Next, they should be placed outside the cover in conspicuous positions on

the sides where the birds will probably try to escape.

Stop-boys should be placed in their positions outside the cover some time before the beating begins. Every boy should be provided with two sticks to knock against each other, and he must keep on doing this, or knocking a tree with one of them, all the time that he occupies his position. Never put the stop-boys too close together; the result would be that two or three of them would collect and play or fight. This is, of course, bad in its effect upon the result of the beat. They should not make too much noise, as the object of stop-boys is not to frighten the birds so much as to put them up, but just sufficiently to induce them to go back and try to escape elsewhere. The boys having been placed sometime beforehand, and having been tapping with their sticks all the time, when the beaters begin to work the birds will probably avoid the places where there are stop-boys, as they have had plenty of

time to observe and hear them before the new danger arose.

If a cover has to be beaten in several pieces, there is another use for the stop-boys. Some of them must accompany the flank man of the beaters on the side which is next to be beaten. This should be seen to by the keeper, who will drop the boys in the ride at regular intervals as the beaters advance. This manœuvre places a line of stop-boys between the part of the cover which has been beaten, and that which is next to be beaten. The birds are thus prevented from running back into the part of the cover from which they have just been driven. It is in such cases as these that the necessity of having the cover cut up into regular sections by well-kept rides, is brought home to the shooter most forcibly.

It is well to go through a beat once or twice with the beaters yourself, as then you are able to see which are the steadiest and most intelligent among them. I have already pointed

out the desirability of employing the same men to beat on all occasions when it is possible. Pick out the best of them as flank men, and let the others have regular numbers, and always work in the same places in relation to each other. If there is a particularly stupid beater, put him between two smart ones, and they will help him to keep in his place.

Always beat down wind if you can. At least arrange that, in the last beat of a series, when most birds are to be put up, that the wind shall be blowing from the birds to the guns and not from the guns to the birds. Pheasants are very sensitive, and will often prefer breaking back over the beaters to going over the guns if the wind is blowing from that direction. Do not beat up hill. If you do, the birds are likely to break back or run out at the sides.

Try to beat towards a narrower part of the cover than that from which you start. This is not always possible, but do it when it is. Do not beat in the teeth of a strong wind

or most of the birds will break back. When coming near the end of a beat, the beaters should stop frequently, making only sufficient noise by tapping the trees to keep the birds from running back. If the men work out too quickly at the end, they will drive out most of the birds together, and will flurry them and make them fly in all directions. If rushed at the end of a beat, it is just as likely as not that a very large proportion of the birds will break back, and never go over the guns at all. What you want to do, is to frighten them enough to put them up, but not enough to stop them having time to make up their minds as to which is apparently the safest direction in which to escape. If you have managed carefully, you will have convinced them that the safest direction is over some spot near the centre of your guns. If the beaters go slowly towards the end, and stop frequently, the birds will have plenty of time to think, and will break out slowly, a few

at a time, most of them going in the same direction.

Should the birds begin to run back, however, it is not wise to delay the beaters. This is, I think, the only circumstance under which they should be pushed on at the end.

Towards the end of a beat, it is as a rule advisable for the flank beaters to work well in advance of the centre, so as to form a crescent. Always see that they beat the margin of the ride or the outside of a cover well, particularly if there be a ditch or hedge. The distance between the beaters will of course depend upon the thickness of the undergrowth in the cover. If the undergrowth is thick, the beaters must be close together.

It is much better to have several little beats than one big one. This is another reason why you should have any large cover which may be on your shoot well rided, because if badly rided, it must necessarily be beaten in large sections. When the cover is cut up by good,

straight and well-kept rides into small sections, although you will only get out most of the birds after three or four beats, yet there will be some shooting distributed throughout the whole time; a few birds are sure to break before the beaters come to the last section of the series. This keeps up the interest both for the guns and the beaters, which is an important point to be considered. You want to give the guns as much pleasure as possible, and to keep the beaters working with a will. Besides, it is much easier to keep the game in a small section of a well-rided wood while beating, than in a large and irregularly shaped piece of cover.

Stop-boys may be supplemented, and to a certain extent replaced, by flags or by sticks about 4 feet long, with large, crumpled pieces of paper attached to them by means of strings about 7 or 8 inches long. These can, of course, only be used outside covers and should be placed in position early in the morning.

Inside the covers, however, there is a substitute for stop-boys which in many cases will be found to work admirably. This is an apparatus called the sewin. It consists of a cord with bundles of feathers and coloured rags attached at intervals of about 12 or 18 inches, and small bells at intervals of about 6 yards. This cord is carried on a winder, and is stretched on forked sticks 4 feet high, along a ride in order to stop pheasants running across. A boy must be put at the end, and keep pulling at the cord to make the bundles of feathers and rags move about and the bells ring. If a considerable length is used, a boy at each end is necessary.

The sewin is very easy to make, is very inexpensive, and may be made to cover a distance of as much as 500 or 600 yards. Besides being used instead of stop-boys, it may be usefully employed inside a cover to prevent the driven birds flying too low.

The guns are generally best worked somewhat in the following way. We will suppose

that there are six guns and a series of beats are to be made up to a final beat which ends at a certain corner. One gun will be placed with the flank beater on each side of the cover. Two will be sent to the points at which the flank beaters will come out at the end of the beat, and told to close in towards each other as the beaters come up, stopping when they are within—say, twenty or thirty yards of each other. The remaining two guns are told to keep forty, fifty, or sixty yards ahead of the beaters' guns, according to the length of the beat, and to stop at points either short of, or beyond the point-guns' original positions, according to circumstances. The beaters' guns should also be given certain points at which to stop, which will also vary according to circumstances. If, for instance, there is a probability of any birds breaking back, they should stop before the end of the beat is reached, or walk behind the beater all the time.

The guns should keep the same relative

positions for each series of beats, and the positions for each series should be changed in rotation. It is most important that the guns should keep in their right places. I have seen many birds go over a spot where there should have been a gun, because the gun, thinking that the birds would break somewhere else, had either pushed on too far or hung back. Such behaviour as this, besides possibly spoiling the beat, may cause considerable annoyance to the other guns, and no amount of keenness can excuse it.

If you are placed outside a cover, do not keep too close to it; you will get much better shots by standing some 20 yards away. If you are inside the cover, try to choose as open a place as possible, so long as you keep by the point at which you were told to stop. Keep perfectly quiet. The less noise you make and the less you move about, the more shots you will get. This last piece of advice is most important.

Remember, that a pheasant really travels through the air much quicker than it appears to.

The old cock pheasant may be distinguished from the young by the length of its spurs. The shooter will, after a short time, be able to distinguish, by this means, not only whether the bird was hatched the same year, but whether it is a last year's bird or one of the year before. A young hen may be distinguished from an old one, by lifting the bird by the lower mandible of the beak. In the young bird the mandible will double up, in the old one it will not.

Do not kill off the hens as freely as the cocks. Many people make a rule on their shoots, that no hens are to be shot after a certain date. It is not wise, however, to go to the opposite extreme, and keep too few cocks.

CHAPTER X

Partridge Shooting

WE now have in England two species of partridges: the original English bird and the French or red-legged partridge. The Frenchman is a modern introduction. These two species vary both in appearance and habits. The French bird is larger, and, as every shooting man knows, it runs more and runs faster than the English bird; it is more timid, and will not lie close and be flushed. It is, indeed, often almost impossible to get a shot at a covey of red-legs over dogs or by walking them up. Many people, however, consider that it is a good thing to have a certain number of them on a shoot, where the birds are driven.

Partridge Shooting

French partridges frequent cover much more than do the English, and will often settle in trees, which the English bird never does. Apart from these differences, the habits of the two species are very much the same, except that the French bird seems to prefer larger and rougher fields than the English.

Both species are found in coveys of from about ten to twenty birds at the beginning of the shooting season, though of course bad fortune may cause the coveys to be smaller. As the English bird on an average lays a larger number of eggs, the coveys generally contain a larger number of birds than do the coveys of Frenchmen. Towards the end of the season, the coveys sometimes tend to amalgamate into flocks, which of course split up when the birds begin to pair. This is called "packing." At the beginning of the pairing season, the males of both species are very pugnacious, and combats, which are sometimes fatal, frequently occur.

Partridge Shooting

Partridges feed mostly in the early morning and in the evening. In the middle of the day they lie hid in cover in a field, often resorting to some dry spot where they can dust themselves. They generally go to roost in the middle of the same field every night, lying in a circle with their heads facing outwards. This makes them an easy prey to the poacher, unless proper precautions are taken to protect them.

As the methods of agriculture have changed, so has shooting partridges over dogs become more and more impracticable. There is no stubble to be found anywhere which will serve as cover to partridges, for the modern machines cut too close to the ground. Roots are rarely sown broadcast, and the straight drills do not give the same cover as the roots did when not arranged in any particular manner.

The best kind of country for walking up birds with two or three guns and dogs, is

where the fields are small, the hedges thick, and rises and falls in the lie of the land frequent. Markers, placed in positions overlooking as large a portion of country as possible, are often advisable, or at any rate very useful in this kind of shooting. In communicating with the markers, avoid shouting or even speaking loud. The quieter every one keeps, the better is the chance of sport: indeed, unless you keep quiet, you are not likely to have any sport at all. If communication between the guns and the markers is necessary at a distance, always whistle, but never shout. Partridges do not mind the sound of a whistle nearly as much as that of the human voice. The guns should walk about 40 yards apart, and the dogs should work between them as well as on either side.

A useful fact to know as a help in marking down partridges is, that in the flutter they give with their wings before alighting, they show the white feathers under their wings. Thus

if the line of flight of a covey is watched, even after they have gone out of sight, this white flash is often seen and shows where they have settled.

Where there is but little cover such as roots in the field, the best thing to do is to try to drive the birds into the hedges, and with a gun on either side, put them out with dogs.

A great point is to break up the coveys as much as possible. When dispersed, the individual birds will lie much closer. As many of them as possible should be marked down and followed up. The best way to break up a covey is to get it between two guns, or between the guns and the dog or dogs before it is flushed. This is of course most easily done with a very steady pointer or setter, but may also be done by two guns entering at opposite ends of a field where a covey has been marked down, or where there is good reason to believe that a covey will be found.

When a covey is dispersed in the middle of the day, particularly in hot weather, the individual birds will generally lie close in the same spot for one or two hours if undisturbed. They seem also to lie longer in the same place towards the middle of October, than they do at the commencement of the season. After a covey has been dispersed, the birds will often call to each other, as they want to get together again. A bird which has not been accurately marked down, may sometimes be accidentally found in this way, if the guns and the dogs are quiet in their movements.

A covey when disturbed, will generally make for some cover, such as roots, long grass, or short cut in a wood. The birds will, if still together, not lie nearly so close after they have been disturbed, but seem to get more and more wild unless the covey is dispersed. When the birds are in close cover such as longish grass, bracken, heather, gorse,

or broom, they will often rise singly, and the covey will sometimes not rise as a body, even after the guns have fired several times. In such cover, therefore, you should work very carefully, particularly if one or two birds have been put up, for there is always a probability of there being more birds left.

Heading off a covey is specially to be recommended in the case of red-legs; in fact it is not probable that many shots will be got in walking them up by any other means. Unlike the English partridge, however, they seem to lie better when they have been disturbed many times in close succession.

Try to avoid working fields down wind, as by doing this the birds will rise much sooner and therefore further away. It is generally possible, and even easy, to work up or across wind.

Do not work down the side of a hill. The birds will see you much more easily if you do this than if you worked up or across.

Nowadays pointers and setters are not nearly so generally used as they were before the introduction of reaping machines and other agricultural improvements, because there is so little cover suitable for them to work in. In roots there can be no doubt that spaniels are much better than pointers or setters. The most necessary, or at any rate one of the most necessary qualities in a spaniel is that it should be perfectly steady. It should not range more than about 20 yards from the guns.

If a fallow field is properly worked, good sport may generally be had with any partridges which may be in it, if the furrows be fairly deep. The great thing is to work the field across the furrows. In this way the birds have better cover, and it is less easy for them to run across furrows than along them.

I have already pointed out that partridges go to roost in the middle of the same field every

night. If, however, they are disturbed after they have settled down for the night, they will desert this field, probably for good. It is therefore unwise to continue shooting too late. You should stop before sunset, and never on any account continue after.

Accurate marking is the most important point in walking up partridges with two or three guns and dogs.

Try to work round the outside of your shoot as much as possible, so as to drive the birds towards the centre. Do not shoot over the same ground too frequently. If you work the same ground every day you will probably drive all the birds which are not killed off it in a couple of weeks. Red-legs are very unsatisfactory birds to walk up; the only way of getting them is to head them off. They will not lie to dogs, but run on the slightest provocation.

In this kind of partridge shooting, though the fields should be worked in a systematic

manner, still a great part of the time will be spent in pursuing birds which have been marked down either by the shooters themselves or the markers. In the case, however, of a country where the fields are large and the stock of birds heavy, a number of guns should walk over the fields in line, with beaters between them. When walking up birds in this way it is most important that the line should be kept regular. If one gun stops the whole line must stop, but this should occur as seldom as possible. In this case, of course, unlike shooting over dogs, the fields are walked by the line of shooters and beaters according to a preconcerted plan. Some extra men with retrievers should follow the line at a distance, to pick up runners and those birds which have not been recovered by the beaters in the firing line.

Partridge driving is a comparatively modern innovation, and has in many parts of the country completely ousted the two preceding

methods. It has many advantages besides giving the guns the most sporting kinds of shots. As the old birds are more likely to be killed off in driving, the stock of birds will be gradually increased, for an old cock or hen will not allow a pair of young birds to nest near them. The birds, too, are less disturbed by one or two days' driving than by being constantly shot over with dogs. Besides, more and more country becomes impracticable for anything but driving every year.

To begin with, driving is best done on a fair-sized shoot, for instance, of about one thousand acres. It may, however, be carried out successfully on a shoot of about five hundred or six hundred acres if it is well managed. The best kind of country is where there are large arable fields divided by high hedges. Belts of trees are also a good thing, as the guns can be placed behind them.

Do not make the drives too long or to cover

too large an extent of ground; if they are short you will have a much better chance of being able to work the birds back again. It is a good thing to go out several times before you beat, without a gun, and observe how the birds fly; you will then be able to arrange your drives more satisfactorily. Never try to drive the birds up wind to the guns. If you cannot drive them down wind, drive them across wind. The drivers should work in a gradually contracting semi-circle towards the guns, and it is a good thing for a man to stand some hundreds of yards on the rear flank of each end of the line of guns to turn the birds. The drivers should also be provided with flags, and should not talk or make a noise. It is hardly necessary to say that the guns, in their position behind a high hedge or belt of trees, should keep perfectly silent and still, out of sight of the coming birds.

The distance of the drivers from each other

at the beginning of the drive must, of course, be influenced by the amount of ground cover. If there is thick cover on the ground, it is often a good thing for them to drag a rope along between them. Where there is little or no ground cover they may start at least 100 yards apart, and sometimes double that distance. They should not be allowed to talk or make any noise. All communication between them should be made by signal. The best time of year to begin driving is about the end of September. If it is unwise to shoot right up to sunset when walking up partridges, so it is a still greater folly to drive them too late in the afternoon, for it is probable that many birds will be driven off the shoot by doing this.

Young partridges may be distinguished from old ones by the colour of their beaks, legs, and feet. In the young bird these parts are of a yellowish colour, in the old bird they are of a bluish-grey tint. Another distinction

is that if the bird be lifted up by the lower mandible of the beak, the mandible will bend if the bird is young, but not if it is old.

When partridge shooting early in the season you may come across landrail. This bird is called the corn-crake during the breeding season, and comes to this country about April, leaving again about the end of September. It nests in England, choosing such places as hay-fields. The old birds leave the young as soon as they are able to look after themselves, and the bird is solitary in its habits. As, however, the same kind of land that suits one, suits also the other, you will be likely to find several where you find one. It is found in fields which contain cover such as grass or roots, and seems to frequent marshy quite as much as dry ground.

Its flight is slovenly and, as a rule, it offers an easy shot, very often hovering for a moment over the spot whence it rose. Landrail lie

very close, and spaniels are by far the best dogs to shoot them over, as they will not rise unless they are hustled. They are most excellent eating.

CHAPTER XI

Rabbits

IF you can keep up a good stock of rabbits without falling foul of the farming tenants, you will be sure of getting a good deal of sport out of them. I have already spoken of the necessity of keeping on good terms with the farmers, particularly with regard to rabbits, so it is unnecessary to do more than refer to that matter.*

The most important point in maintaining a good stock of rabbits, is to kill down a large part of the old stock, particularly the bucks, and to import fresh blood every year. Be very careful that the rabbits you introduce are wild rabbits; even a slight taint of tame blood will

* See Chapters VI. and VII.

render the progeny much more liable to disease, and the more tame blood there is in a rabbit the less sport it will give. Many people turn down tame rabbits, particularly Belgian hares, in order to increase the size, but this is the greatest possible mistake.

The buck rabbits are generally more easily killed down as they are more venturesome, but if you are unable to kill more bucks than does, you should import a few does as well as bucks.

Ground vermin, such as rats, stoats, and weasels, do an enormous amount of harm to the stock of rabbits, so it is very necessary that they should be kept well under. Cats will often destroy whole families of young, indeed I have known a cat bring in a young rabbit every night for a week at a time. Foxes also work sad havoc.

There are many ways of shooting rabbits. Perhaps one of the best points about them is that they add to the sport when a cover is

beaten for pheasants. The same precautions in beating as serve to bring the pheasants to the guns, serve also to bring the rabbits, and if there are not very many birds in the cover, the rabbits will prove a great boon.

When beating for rabbits, just as for pheasants, never beat down wind if you can avoid it. The beaters should be told to poke bushes with their sticks and not to beat them. Rabbits bolt very readily when bushes are poked, but they will not do so for a great deal of beating. Stops, to prevent the rabbits from running off to the part of the cover which has already been beaten, are even more necessary than when beating for pheasants only.

It is no good trying to do very much in the way of shooting rabbits in cover before most of the leaves are off, as not only are the beaters likely to miss a large number, but the rabbits will not afford many shots unless they can be made to bolt into the open.

In cover, unless the rides are very wide, rabbit-shooting is to a great extent snap-shooting. It is very often necessary to shoot at a spot where you know the rabbit's head must be, as it may happen that he only shows himself for a fraction of a second. Be very careful, however, never to fire into the cover in the direction in which you know the beaters or other guns are, no matter whether you think that they must be out of shot or not.

Very good sport may be got by hunting hedges for rabbits with spaniels. A gun on each side of the hedge is necessary. It is most important that the dogs should be steady, or they will chase a rabbit up a hedge, and put it out out of shot. Always work a hedge that runs into a cover, away from the cover, or else the rabbits will run into it without giving you a shot. In the case of clumps of gorse and bracken, particularly if they are near a cover or a bury, put the dogs in at the side nearest the cover,

and let them work it thoroughly. One gun should stand on each side of a clump of gorse, and at some distance from it, so as to command it all round. With dogs that work well, excellent sport can be had by two guns out of the hedges, gorse, and clumps of short cover. As dogs sometimes chase rabbits very closely, care must be taken not to shoot them by accident.

Spaniels are sometimes used very successfully to work rabbits in small pieces of cover, and I have even seen good bags made with a number of them in large but well-rided covers late in the season. In this case the spaniels are worked through the different sections of cover by one man, and the guns are placed round, at spots where they can see for some distance round them. The dogs should be kept well in hand, and worked regularly through each piece of cover in order. If the dogs are wild, they will spoil all by running across the rides into another section to that which they are working.

Shooting over spaniels in short-cut in a wood is one of the best ways of getting sport with rabbits.

Ferreting is not very exciting unless the rabbits bolt well and this is not, as some would have us believe, influenced only by the weather and other unmanageable causes. As often as not the rabbits will not bolt because the people who are out ferreting will not keep quiet. Talking should be avoided, and if any directions have to be given, they should be in a low tone. Do not run or stamp on the ground over the earths, but walk as gently as possible.

There are a great many people who work ferrets, having but a very limited idea of how to manage them properly. The old sack, which is generally used to carry ferrets about, is an abomination. They should be carried in boxes specially made for the purpose, and these boxes must be kept clean. The ferret hutches should also be kept scrupulously clean, in a

dry, airy, and protected position. They should never be kept on the ground, and the doors should be so made that the whole of the inside of the hutch can be got at to clean. The hutches should be well made, and free from cracks which would harbour dirt, but they should be well ventilated.

These precautions are necessary, because the ferret is particularly susceptible to diseases caused by dirt, and easily gets vermin in its coat. It stands to reason that if they are not in perfect health, and if they are infested with vermin, they will not work as well as if they are clean and healthy. The sack in which they are generally carried about is stuffy and dirty, and so when they are taken from it they will not be in the best condition to begin work, and will probably pick up a lot of insects. Ferrets are very susceptible to the influence of cold, and will often die from the effects of one night's exposure.

In handling ferrets, do not grab or snatch at

them. They should be taken up quickly and firmly, but never snatched at. If they are always well handled, they will rarely give any trouble on this score. The vicious ferret is generally one which has been badly handled.

If a ferret lies up, there are various ways of dealing with it according to circumstances. Sometimes it may be induced to come out by a rabbit, the belly of which has been ripped open, being put at the entrance of a hole connected with the bury in which it has laid up. In this case a hole to windward should if possible be chosen. It is most important to peg the rabbit down if this is done, otherwise the ferret will, if it comes out, pull the rabbit in, and the case will be worse than it was before.

If this does not succeed, the only thing to do is to dig out the ferret. A line-ferret should be put into the hole to find out the whereabouts of the other, and the line followed carefully.

Do not dig in a careless manner, or you may injure the ferret, and will not be so likely to follow the right hole.

Work a young ferret in short holes and dig it out at once if it lies up. It will thus be taught to think that if it lies up, it will at once be extracted from the hole, and returned ignominiously to its box.

Never work ferrets when they show signs of being tired, and if you find, having several ferrets in a bury, that no more rabbits bolt, pick them up when they show themselves, or there is a very fair chance of their lying up. It is a good thing to take out some milk to give the ferrets a drink occasionally; they will work much better if this is done.

Muzzles are not as a rule advisable, particularly where there is any chance of there being rats in the place which is being worked, as the rats will be likely to injure the ferret, having it at a disadvantage. Rats

are most often found when working holes in hedges.

There is another way of shooting rabbits in cover which is very common in Sussex, but of which I have never heard in any other part of the country. This is shooting them over a pack of beagles. Some people keep a pack specially for this purpose, and as well as hunting their own covers, lend them to other men. Sometimes, in East Sussex particularly, farmers keep small packs and let them out at a charge of about 10s a day with a man to hunt them. These packs are generally supplemented by two or three odd couples to make up seven or eight couple, which is the usual number.

The beagles generally used are an old-fashioned large kind, though of course in a scratch pack there are all kinds and sizes. In a very large cover, a scratch pack is by no means always a disadvantage, for it will split up and hunt several rabbits, thus

bustling them up and disturbing many more than if the whole pack were after one rabbit.

The guns, and there should be plenty of them if there are many rabbits, are placed in advantageous positions round the part of the cover which is to be drawn, and move on to the next part of the cover when the beagles are taken there. The man who hunts the beagles—I will not call him the huntsman—should know exactly in which way the covers are to be worked. If the piece of cover is a large one, the hounds should be worked from one corner right round it, finishing up at the spot from which they started.

In this form of rabbit shooting, as in most kinds of shooting, the man who is quietest will get the most.

Rabbit shooting over beagles is generally not begun until the covers have been beaten for pheasants; occasional shots are, however, got at pheasants, though it is astonishing how

little the birds seem to mind the hounds. They often seem to refuse to be disturbed by them.

Both before beating and beagling, it is wise to turn the rabbits out of their buries if they are not lying out. This is best done by stopping up the holes and sprinkling plentifully with gas-tar. The rabbits will soon scratch their way out, when the holes should again be stopped and more gas-tar applied. Naturally it is necessary to begin these operations some time before the day arranged for the shoot. All the rabbits ought to be out in about a week, and will not try to get back for a fortnight or three weeks. A less effectual, but a quicker way of turning out rabbits, is by putting pieces of rag steeped in carbolic in the mouths of the buries. The rabbits will generally leave a bury treated in this way in two days at the outside, and will not go back for about a fortnight.

On no account allow the rabbits to be

ferreted out for a beat or for beagling, for this does more harm than good, and is a great deal more trouble than the two preceding methods.

Very good fun of a mild kind may be had in shooting rabbits with a rook rifle. As it is given to but few men to be able to shoot a running rabbit with a bullet, the best way of doing this is to take a book and a pipe and lie up for them to come out to feed in the evening. Chance shots may also be got with a rifle, by walking round hedges in the evening.

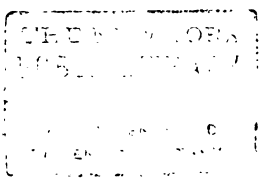
For this I recommend my reader to buy one of the small bore American rifles. About the best bore is the ·22. There are several magazine rook rifles of American manufacture on the market which are most accurately sighted and reliable in every way; in fact, except for a single little inconvenience, these American rook rifles are better than similar ones of English make which cost double the money.

The Americans seem to be ahead of us in the manufacture of rifles.

This inconvenience lies in the fact that the American ·22 rook rifles foul terribly with the ammunition made for them, and there is at present no way of avoiding this fouling. The barrel should be wiped out after every twenty shots, and particular care must be taken in cleaning it thoroughly after shooting. If left dirty for even a few hours, the barrel is likely to get pitted, and then the shooting may be spoiled. The barrel should first be wiped out with tow, to remove the major part of the fouling. Some fresh tow with one of the anti-corrosive preparations should then be applied, and the barrel rubbed out with it very thoroughly. The anti-corrosive compound must then be wiped out with dry tow, and a brass wire or bristle brush run through the barrel a number of times.

Apart from the inconvenience I have just mentioned, American magazine rook rifles

PHEASANT'S NEST IN A HOP GARDEN



which are satisfactory and reliable in every way, can be bought for about £3. A sound single shot English rook rifle, ·250, which is perhaps the most satisfactory bore in this class of rifle, will probably cost from £5 upwards. It is not so liable to fouling, and is therefore rather less trouble to clean.

CHAPTER XII

How to Obtain a Good Supply of Eggs

A CERTAIN number of eggs may be obtained, both pheasants' and partridges', from the nests of wild birds. In any case it is as well for the keeper to know the whereabouts of most of the nests on the shoot.

Both pheasants and partridges sometimes make their nests in most exposed places. I have frequently seen them in hedges and clumps of brambles or gorse, quite close to a much-frequented footpath. In such cases, it is as a rule advisable to remove the eggs and put them under a hen, for a bird, if disturbed while laying is likely to desert its nest. At any rate the nest should be most carefully

watched, so that it may be known at once if the bird does desert.

A partridge or pheasant is much more easily frightened into deserting her nest while she is laying, than after she has begun to sit. In the former case she is also more likely to make another nest. The longer she has been sitting, the less likely she is to desert. If frightened by a human being on one occasion only, she will probably not desert, even when she is laying, but if flushed by a dog or fox, it is most unlikely that she will return, even when she has been sitting for some time.

It is while the bird is sitting, that she is most likely to fall a prey to the fox or strolling dog.

The pheasant as a rule makes her nest in a secluded part of a cover, but hedges are perhaps the commonest places chosen by the partridge. The partridge, however, frequently makes her nest in the middle of hay fields, and many nests are destroyed annually by the mowing machines. The pheasant has, in

A PHEASANT'S NEST

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England, become polygamous, but the partridge is monogamous, pairing probably for life. The hen pheasant begins to nest in April, generally laying about twelve eggs, but sometimes as many as twenty. She is a bad mother. English partridges begin to pair in February, but do not nest until May. The hen partridge is an excellent mother, so if the vermin are kept well under it is always best to leave the eggs under her, unless the nest is in a very exposed place, or the hen deserts. The French partridge does not pair till April, but the hen generally goes to nest a little earlier than the English bird. The nests are made in very similar places to those of the English bird.

The eggs of both the pheasant and partridge take, on an average, three weeks and three days to hatch. They are very similar in appearance, being nearly as broad as they are long. The egg of the pheasant is a little over one and three-quarters inches in length, while those of the English partridge are a little under

one and a half inches. The eggs of both are of a similar colour, varying from a greenish brown to a greenish blue. When first laid they are unspotted, but after a time they are often speckled with dark brown. Keepers often say that the eggs never have these brown speckles on them unless the bird has begun to sit, but I have not had any opportunity of verifying this statement. As, however, eggs will stand a much longer period of neglect when in an advanced stage of incubation than they will at first, it is as well to keep this point in mind in deciding whether it is worth while putting eggs from a deserted nest under a hen.

The egg of the French partridge is a little over one and a half inches in length. They are generally of a pale brown colour, and are always speckled. The eggs of the French partridge are frequently found in the nests of English partridges and pheasants. I once observed a case of a pheasant laying in a partridge's nest, and the partridge hatched

A PARTRIDGE'S NEST BETWEEN TWO FAGGOTS

TILDEN FOUNDATIONS

out both her own and the pheasant's eggs successfully.

I do not think that on a small shoot, it is generally advisable to rear partridges to any extent. Eggs which have been deserted should of course be taken up and hatched under hens, and the same may be done if the bird is killed by a fox. Otherwise, as the partridge is a good mother, it is best to leave the eggs and keep down the vermin. Even on a large shoot I have no doubt that this is the best plan.

In speaking of the general management of a shoot, I suggested that rewards should be offered to the farm hands for pointing out nests to the keeper or owner of the shooting, but these rewards should never be offered for the eggs themselves. This applies particularly to partridges' eggs. A reward should be offered for showing a nest, which will be supplemented by a further reward if the bird brings off her brood successfully. If the eggs are taken up by the keeper, as may well happen,

particularly in the case of pheasants' eggs, something nearly as much as the two rewards together should be given at once. This will render the farm hands particularly anxious to find those nests which are in exposed places, which is just what is wanted.

One habit of both pheasants and partridges no doubt serves them to some extent from the depredations of foxes. This is that while the hen is sitting, she leaves and comes back again to her nest by flying, and thus avoids leaving a scent track by which the fox might follow her to her nest. As I have pointed out in Chapter VIII., nesting time is the period of the year in which the fox does the most harm to the stock of birds on a shoot.

The best way of getting a good supply of pheasants' eggs, is to catch up a sufficient number of hens and cocks and put them in a pheasantry. For a small number of birds, a pheasantry made in the following way is, I think, the best and cheapest.

How to obtain a good Supply of Eggs

Choose your site in a dry spot, some level area on the side of a gentle slope with a south aspect is the best. The morning sun should have access to it, for birds put into a sunny pheasantry, or rather one in which they can get the sun if they want it, will begin to lay quite a fortnight earlier than if the same birds were put into one where they could get little or no sun.

Keeping this point about the sun well in mind, try to choose a spot in a cover. Besides being then in more natural surroundings, the birds will be much less likely to be disturbed. The nearer your pheasantry is to the keeper's cottage the better, if it fulfils these other requirements, which are most important.

The pheasantry should be divided into compartments, each of which will contain a cock and his proper complement of hens. The best proportion of hens to cocks is about five to one. These compartments should measure about 12 by 6 yards, and be about

9 feet high. Stout wooden posts should form the corners of the pheasantry, and lighter posts at intervals of 2 yards at most along the sides. A bar must be run along the top of these posts, to which to fasten the wire net which is spread over the top and sides of the pheasantry. The mesh of this net should be not less than 2 inches, and I think that a 1½-inch mesh is better. A bar from the middle of the sides along the top of the pheasantry will help to support the part of the netting which corresponds to a roof.

All round the sides and ends of the pheasantry, boarding should be put to the height of about 4 feet. This is most important, as the pheasant, being a very shy bird, will be disturbed and frightened at anything looking in at it from outside. The boarding of 4 feet in height, should prevent this happening, it should be put outside the wire netting, and should be sunk an inch or two into the ground.

A PHEASANTRY

TILDEN FOUND

How to obtain a good Supply of Eggs

As it is not advisable to keep the pheasantry on the same piece of ground for more than three or four years, it is best to fasten the wire on to the frame by means of staples only half driven in.

The ground forming the floor should be dug up after the birds are turned out of the pheasantry, of course avoiding digging up any shrubs which may be growing. Lime should also be sprinkled freely on the ground which has been turned up. If the pheasantry is made in a cover, the shrubs and other undergrowth should be left, if in the open it must be planted with shrubs such as privet.

The site of the pheasantry will naturally depend upon the number of eggs required. You may depend upon getting about twenty eggs, which will produce strong healthy chickens, from each hen, and therefore each compartment of the size I have described will contain birds which will yield about one

hundred eggs. Probably, if things are properly managed, you will get rather more than one hundred eggs from the hens in each of these compartments.

The hens should be caught up not later than the middle of December, and many people think that it is advisable to catch them up before the shooting season begins. I think that a hen which has completed her second year at the time she begins to lay, is about the best age to rear from, though those which have completed their first year do not do badly. It is not necessary to catch up the cocks so soon as it is the hens, but the cocks must be two-year-olds. It is most important that both cocks and hens should be perfectly strong and healthy.

While in the pheasantry, the birds should be given a fair allowance of green food and game meal as well as grain. If you notice that any of the food is left, give them less. There should also be dusting places for the birds, so

if the soil is heavy, sand should be put down in suitable places. Shells of some kind should be powdered, and heaps of the powder put in the pheasantry. A certain amount of grit and small gravel should be strewed about occasionally. If these precautions are adopted, the birds should do well.

Some people provide boxes for the hen pheasants to lay in, but I do not think that this is advisable. If there is, as there should be, plenty of cover in the pheasantry, the birds will be likely to make nests for themselves. If artificial nesting places are thought advisable, they are best made by nailing a bar to two posts stuck into the ground about 3 feet from the side of the pheasantry. Twig faggots are laid over this bar from the boarding forming the side. This roof should be about 3 feet from the ground, sloping downwards from the side of the pheasantry.

The birds will probably begin to lay about the middle of April, and when a sufficient

supply of eggs has been obtained, the birds should be turned out. It is probable that if the birds in the pheasantry begin to lay fairly early, as should be the case if things are properly managed, the hens which are turned out will make nests for themselves, and very likely hatch off a brood.

Whether the birds which are in confinement lay early or not, it is advisable to provide for the hatching and care of more eggs than are expected from the pheasantry. A certain number of eggs will have to be taken from wild birds, either through the hen being killed or being so frightened as to desert her nest. Besides this, a certain number of partridges' eggs will have to be taken and put under hens in order to save them in the case of similar casualties.

A very important point with regard to obtaining a healthy stock of young birds, is the importation of fresh blood. You will most likely be able to arrange the exchange of

a few cocks with some other shooting man. Some of the crosses with the Hungarian bird have been very successful, and the versicolour pheasant is said to stray less than the ring-necked or common pheasant. The bird produced by a cross with the versicolour pheasant is also a better flier.

CHAPTER XIII

Rearing Pheasants and Partridges

ONE of the points in the management and improvement of a shoot about which there exist the most mistaken ideas, is the rearing of birds. If properly managed, the rearing of pheasants repays the owner of the shoot over and over again, but if not properly managed it is one of the most expensive things the shooting man can do.

To begin with, I must explain that I am not speaking of shoots where a thousand or so of pheasants are reared, for about them I know but little; but as game farms pay well, it is probable that when rearing is carried on in an

economical way, it can be done more cheaply than it is by the average shooting man. Even the owners of medium-sized shoots, however, find as a rule that their birds cost them nearly a sovereign a head.

The shoot about which I am writing is one which can be well looked after by one keeper. As a rule, in such a case, one keeper though he is necessary, has not enough to do to occupy his time properly unless some birds are reared. He must be paid in any case, so his wages should not be counted in the cost of rearing the birds.

Having taken measures to obtain a sufficient supply of eggs, it is necessary to procure a place in which to rear the young birds. The best and most suitable kind of ground for this purpose is a pasture field with fairly light soil on a gentle slope. South-east is the best aspect, as the birds will then get the morning sun. Each hen will take about fifteen eggs or young birds in a clutch, and an acre of ground should

A GOOD REARING FIELD

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be allowed for every hundred young birds. A piece of newly cut short-cut in a cover will do fairly well for rearing if it is of sufficient extent and the soil is light.

New ground should be chosen every year, and ground on which chickens have been reared must be scrupulously avoided. If stale ground is used the little birds are very likely indeed to develop disease.

Arrangements about getting a supply of broody hens should be made beforehand if possible. Be very careful to get hens which are clean, perfectly healthy, well feathered, not too heavy, and not too old. A draggled old hen is not at all likely to prove a good mother, and as she will probably be infested with vermin, she should be avoided. Broody hens cost about 2*s* 6*d*. In some localities they can be bought for a little less as a rule, while in others they are a trifle more expensive. You should be able to sell the broody hens after the young birds are turned out for about

two-thirds of what you paid for them. To make sure that they are broody, you or your keeper should see them taken off the nest.

It is best to have the coops made by the local carpenter, as it is always well to give work to the local people. These coops will cost from about 3*s* each. A certain number of guards should be procured, though as these are only necessary for a few days in the case of each coop, and the different clutches will hatch out at different times, not so many sets of guards as coops are required. The guards consist simply of three boards arranged as shown in the accompanying illustration. An iron or wooden standard is stuck into the ground behind each of the boards to hold them up.

The coops must be fitted with boards to cover the open fronts at night. To give the birds as much room as possible, it is best to arrange the coops in the way shown in the

GUARDS ON COOP

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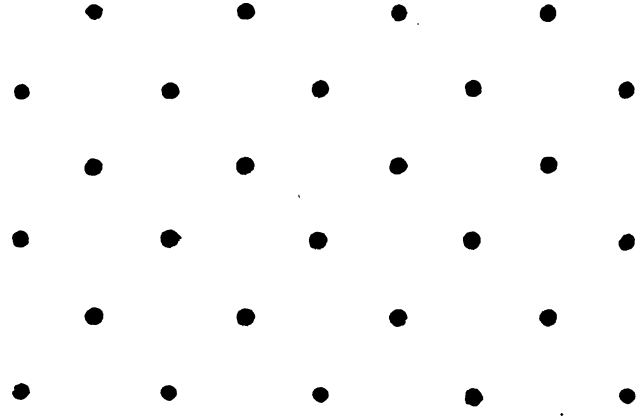
diagram (see p. 233). They must be kept very clean, and should be well washed with lime at the beginning of the season.

I have already spoken of the feeding of the penned birds, and pointed out the necessity of giving them green food as well as grain. Care must also be taken to disturb them as little as possible, even on going into the pheasantry to collect the eggs. The boarding outside will prevent their being disturbed by foxes, dogs, cats, or other vermin, but no one should be allowed to go and watch them or disturb them in any way. Care must be taken to have none but healthy birds to breed from. They should be caught up early.

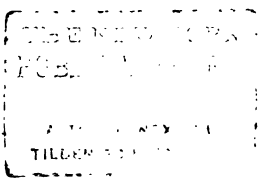
The broody hen should be ready to receive the eggs at the time they are taken, and it is a good plan to keep her in a dim light and quite undisturbed for a few days. When quite quiet, the hens may be put in the coops to sit. They must be allowed to come off the eggs to feed once a day. If they will not come off,

they must be lifted off gently by the wings, passing the hands under the wings to make sure that no eggs are lifted. Never feed a hen on the nest. Nothing more than a slight depression in the ground, with a little hay well pressed into it, is necessary. Loose hay is a mistake, as the hen is likely to get entangled in it and thus break the eggs. It is quite a mistake to suppose that it is necessary to keep the nest and eggs dry while the hen is sitting. Some moisture is necessary to their well-being. Dusting places should be provided for the hen when she comes off her nest to feed. I do not think that it is generally advisable to put more than about fifteen eggs under one hen, though I have known one hatch out and rear eighteen pheasant chicks and four partridges in a clutch, only killing one chick by treading it. If too many are put in a clutch the hens are very likely to tread some of the little birds or break the eggs.

The eggs should be examined while the hen



ARRANGEMENT OF PHEASANT COOPS



is feeding and dusting. If one is broken, fresh hay should be pressed in and the old hay removed. The other eggs should be carefully washed in warm water, as also should the breast of the hen if her feathers are draggled.

You will find that some of the hens are far better mothers than others, and there is no reason why, when the fact of a hen's being a particularly good mother is ascertained, she should not be given a few extra eggs or chicks. Do not put your hens to sit close together in boxes inside a barn or other building; they are sure to get dirty and full of vermin if you do. What a keeper calls a "lousy" hen is always fidgety and a bad mother. She is also likely to give some disease to the chicks. A very slight hollow in the turf under a good tight coop, which is well away from the other coops and on the side of a hill, is the best place for a hen to sit and rear her brood. The eggs should be occasionally watered with lukewarm water, particularly just before hatching.

The front board must be put up at night, or there will be a fair chance of the eggs or chicks being destroyed.

The guards should be put up before the chicks hatch out, and be kept up for two, three, or four days, according to circumstances, after they are hatched. They should be given little or no food on the first day. While the hen is sitting, she should be fed once a day on boiled maize or other grain. The amount given will of course vary with the different hens, but a liberal handful is about right. The hen should not be kept off the eggs for more than about ten minutes in the day just at first, but may be allowed longer the nearer the eggs get to hatching. Remember not to let the hens get together when they are feeding. They will be sure to fight and will then not sit well.

In collecting eggs from wild birds, it is well to remember that while they will addle if deserted at the beginning of the period of incubation even for a comparatively short

time, later on, when the hen-bird has been sitting for about a fortnight, they are unharmed by being left as long as twenty-four hours.

Upon the proper feeding of the young birds, success in rearing them to a great extent depends. The most important points in connection with feeding are, that the food should be perfectly fresh, each lot being mixed only as it is required, and that the feeding should be done with the utmost regularity. The food being mixed overnight for the early morning meal, or enough mixed in the morning for the whole day, will probably mean that a large proportion of the young birds will be sacrificed.

Hardly two keepers have exactly the same ideas as to what are the best mixtures upon which to feed young pheasants, but there are few really important points upon which they differ. Naturally at first the food must be very finely divided, as large lumps would be likely to choke the little birds when they tried

to swallow them. Eggs and milk, well mixed and made into a firm custard, should be at first mixed with the other food. This may be rubbed through a sieve; but if a sieve is used it must be kept clean and sweet, otherwise some pieces of sour food will be mixed with the fresh.

The egg-custard is mixed with equal quantities of fine game meal and fine oatmeal, both of which have been steamed until thoroughly softened. The mixture is now half custard, quarter game meal, and quarter oatmeal. Sharps, which have been put through a sieve to remove any pieces of fibre or husk, are added to this in a sufficient quantity to remove any sticky feeling. To this mixture may be added some boiled and crushed hemp seed.

When the birds are about a week old, a little boiled rice and finely chopped green food should be added. The green parts of leeks and onions are as good green food as can be

given. At the end of the next week less of the sharps and fine game meal is used, the egg custard is gradually discontinued, and greaves and coarser game food substituted for the finer food. When they are about five weeks old, the young birds will begin to take grain.

Ants' eggs are most excellent food, and if they exist in any numbers on your shoot, they will save a good deal of money.

For the first three weeks at least of their lives, the little birds must be fed four or five times a day, preferably five. The first meal should be given by six o'clock at latest, and the last at six or half-past in the evening. The intermediate meals should be given at regular intervals.

Do not remove the guards from the coops, which were put up before the little birds hatched out, if the weather is rough. A high wind is much more dangerous to the pheasant-chicks than rain, and for this reason. If they

leave the coop when it is raining they soon feel cold, and want to return to their mother. The hen knows that it is bad for her chicks to be out in the rain, and calls to them. Hearing the call guides the little bird back to its mother, and all is well. Suppose, however, that a high wind is blowing; the little chick cannot hear the hen calling, and will in all probability fail to find the coop again. If it does not find the coop very quickly it will die in an astonishingly short time. I have known of pheasant-chicks a few days old, straying in weather that was cold, windy and rainy, and being killed by the exposure—the keeper called it "starved"—in less than an hour, and within 15 yards of the coop. In still weather the little birds will get tired and cold before they have strayed out of hearing of the hen's call, but if the weather is stormy, the guards must be kept on until it is fine, or the birds are nearly a week old. The covers must be fastened to the front of the coops every night.

The grass for 4 or 5 yards round the coops should be cut short; beyond this distance it is a good thing to keep it long, as it affords cover to the young birds.

On the other hand, it is satisfactory for the little birds to show signs of wildness early. When they are a fortnight old they should stray about, to some extent, looking for food, and should want to hide from intruders. They are by that time much more capable of looking after themselves, and are not likely to be lost. The coops should be put facing east or south-east, in order that the hens and the little birds may get the morning sun. If there are no bushes about the rearing field, some branches of trees must be put down by the coops as is shown in the accompanying illustration. These give shade to the young birds, and also form a cover in which they can hide. It is important that the birds should have dusting places. If the soil is heavy, these can be made with sand. The young birds

should be let out of the coops at daybreak. Each coop should be moved a few feet every day; this prevents the ground getting foul and tainted.

Water should be given to the young birds and the hens once daily, when they have their mid-day meal. If there is any sign of a contagious disease all the water should be boiled before it is given to them, and the saucers, or whatever the receptacles are in which the water is given, should be kept scrupulously clean. They ought, of course, to be kept clean in any case, but extra care must be taken in the case of an epidemic. Some keepers give saffron in the water. A little of it is put into boiling water until the whole is of a pale yellow colour.

Young pheasants which are being reared artificially, are subject to a number of diseases. There can be no doubt that these are generally caused by some mistake in the management of the birds. If they are on fresh and uncon-

ARTIFICIAL COVER FOR THE PHEASANT CHICKS

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taminated ground, if the coops and the broody hens are clean, if the birds are not crowded, and the food fresh and sweet, the risk of disease is reduced to a minimum.

Young pheasants sometimes suffer from diarrhœa. This may be due to sour food, cold, damp, and a variety of other causes, but is often the first symptom of disease. An additional quantity of rice with the food will often put this right. The bird generally seems droopy and uncomfortable when it is suffering from diarrhœa, and when this is noticed, half a tea spoonful of brandy with a little ginger in it may be given to the affected bird.

A disease known as sore mouth, which goes on to roup, sometimes breaks out as an epidemic among the young birds. It begins with a slight discoloured discharge from the mouth and nostrils, and may be noticed at once. The young bird keeps near the coop, and the small feathers round the margin of the

beak are draggled and wet. The disease is very contagious, and the affected bird should at once be removed. If you can move the healthy birds to fresh ground, you will very likely save them from contagion. The coop must be given a good coat of lime wash and the vessels from which the birds drink thoroughly boiled. Never leave an affected bird with the others after the first signs have shown themselves, and do not wait a minute for the disease to develop so as to make sure that the bird is really affected. The simplest, and I am inclined to think the cheapest course in the end to pursue, is to kill the affected bird and burn the body.

Young pheasants are particularly liable to a disease known as "gapes." This is due to a worm which infects the wind-pipe. The infected birds must be isolated at once, as the disease is very contagious. Attempts may be made to cure them, but the treatment is difficult. The chick may be held over a hot

brick on which carbolic acid is poured, until it is nearly asphyxiated. Another plan is to dip a feather, previously stripped of its fibres except a little tuft at the end, in an 8 per cent. solution of salicylic acid. This feather is introduced into the wind-pipe of the affected bird, and twisted round before it is withdrawn, thus dragging the worms with it. Garlic should be boiled in the water which is given to the chicks, and finely chopped garlic may also be added to the food.

Gapes seem to be in some way connected with a parasite found on the heads of very young chicks. How far this is true it is difficult to say, but it is at any rate a fact that chicks of the ordinary fowl, if treated for this parasite, have never been known to suffer from gapes, even when they have been reared in an infected yard. This parasite is found in the head and neck feathers of the chick, shortly after it is hatched, and may be easily destroyed by anointing the head and neck

of the chick with mercurial ointment. The ointment should be warmed before using, in order to render it soft. It should be rubbed in gently but thoroughly. When a bird developes gapes, the rest of the clutch may be treated in this way. A dram of salicylic acid should also be added to each pint of drinking water.

Cramp is a paralysis of the legs, and ends in death. There is no cure for it. Neither is there any cure for tuberculosis. Ophthalmia, which seems to be caused by cold and wet, is not curable, and is contagious.

The best way of avoiding disease is to have perfectly clean coops, fresh ground, avoiding particularly ground on which poultry have been reared, good, clean and healthy mothers, fresh food, plenty of space for the birds, and an infusion of new blood as often as possible. If these conditions are fulfilled there should be but little chance of any outbreak of disease, though of course there will always be a few weakly chicks which will never do well.

While the sitting and hatching of the pheasants' eggs is going on, a certain number of partridges' eggs will very likely be obtained. If a whole clutch is taken at a time, it may be put under a broody hen, and the number made up with pheasants' eggs—in the same stage of incubation if that is possible to arrange. Otherwise, if only two or three eggs are obtained at a time, they may be placed under a hen with pheasants' eggs. Practically the same advice as I have given with regard to the pheasant chicks, applies also to the partridges. The only difference in the feeding is, that if possible, a large proportion of their food should consist of ants' eggs. Ants' nests are found in large numbers in many places, and there should not be much difficulty in finding a sufficient supply to feed a few partridge chicks.

The ants' eggs are also very good food for the young pheasants, so there is no difficulty about feeding a mixed brood. One point

about taking ants' eggs which is generally neglected by the keeper, is that the nest should not be completely destroyed by taking all the eggs. If some of them are left, you will be able to get another supply of eggs from the same nest the following year. The diseases to which young partridges are liable are the same as those of young pheasants.

A particularly pleasing point about rearing partridges, is that they can be turned down to look after themselves in about six weeks. Care must, however, be taken in doing this. If you have about fifty partridges and turn them all down together in the same place, they will keep together in one huge covey. In this case it is very probable that the first time you put them up and shoot at them in the season, they will fly off your shoot, and you will never see them again. They should be turned down in small batches at intervals of two or three days. Different places should be chosen for each lot.

When the young pheasants are about five or six weeks old, the coops should be removed to a piece of short-cut in a cover where the birds are to be turned down. Some people prefer moving the young birds to a field near the cover. They are best put down in different places, in different covers, in batches of not more than thirty or forty young birds. Choose covers in which there is water and into which poultry are not likely to stray. The food is now gradually changed, until nothing but maize and other grain is given. The birds will soon stray into the thicker parts of the cover, coming out only to feed. Feeding twice a day is soon sufficient, and the way in which it should be done, and the young birds kept at home, I have already described in writing of the general management of a shoot.*

If things are properly managed, the feeding of the young birds up to the time they are

* Chapter VII., p. 128.

brought to the gun, should not cost more than about 2*s* a head, and sometimes it can be done for less. This does not of course include the feeding which is done in the woods in the late winter and early spring. The cost of this will depend upon the number of wild birds which are left at the end of the season. It will not in any case be a large item of expense.

Small patches of rape will induce the birds to stay at home, and it should not be a difficult thing to arrange for these with the farmers. Some arrangement can also be made about leaving small pieces of wheat or other grain about.

Suitable dusting places should be provided near the feeding places in the covers.

Some people rear a few guinea-fowls, and turn them down with the pheasants. This plan has many points which recommend it to the preserver. The guinea-fowl is a timid bird, and when frightened makes a great noise. It is more wide-awake than the pheasant, and

not so likely to be caught napping. The idea is, that the guinea-fowl will make sufficient noise in case of danger to disturb all the pheasants at any rate, if not the keeper. Any one who knows the harsh note of this bird, will understand that this is quite possible.

Guinea-fowls are not at all difficult to rear, and soon reach an age at which they are able to look after themselves. They should be kept with the pheasants, and put in the short-cut in the cover with them. They are rather difficult to put up when beating, but when you can get them up, they fly fairly well. They get wild very quickly and roost in the trees. It is advisable to kill off the guinea-fowls at the end of the season and rear fresh birds, as the cock is very pugnacious and will fight to the death with the wild cock-pheasants.

CHAPTER XIV

Woodcock and Snipe

THOUGH a few woodcock nest in England, the majority are only winter visitors. They arrive in numbers almost simultaneously, but disperse when they have reached our shores. Some come as early as October, but the greater number do not arrive until the middle of November.

When the woodcock first lands, he is generally in very poor condition, but recovers in a marvellously short space of time. The large bags of woodcock are generally made in covers which are near the sea, though a certain number are distributed throughout the country during the winter months.

The covers most frequented by the woodcock during the day, are those in which there is

plenty of undergrowth, particularly long grass They seem to like a sunny slope better than one which is in the shade. If in these covers there are any hollies or evergreen bushes, it is under these that the bird is most likely to be found.

It does not fly about or run during the day unless it is disturbed, but when it is flushed, it will sometimes run considerable distances after alighting. It shows a great tendency to fly round and pitch again in a place near to that from which it was flushed, and will often come back to the border of a piece of cover where it was disturbed, particularly if there is a ditch and the undergrowth is thick there. This should be remembered when shooting woodcock over dogs.

The woodcock feeds at night, and generally at a considerable distance from where it spends the day. It flies as a rule over the same course to and from its feeding grounds.

As they will often change their ground on

a change in the weather or even for no apparent reason, if you hear that there are woodcock in your covers, go and try for them at once, or you may not have another chance.

In beating where there are likely to be woodcock, the beaters should work very thoroughly, as the bird will lie exceedingly close if it can conceal itself. You should also work a place very thoroughly if you are shooting over dogs, when you think that there is a chance of a cock.

Whether it is wise or not to fire at a woodcock the moment you see it depends upon circumstances. If you are in a cover and there is no chance of getting more than a glimpse, you must shoot at sight, but not if you can get a fair view for some distance. Unless it is dodging about among trees, the woodcock does not as a rule give difficult shots; the reason why it is so often missed is because every shooter is so anxious to hit it.

When flushed in a cover, the woodcock

makes for the nearest opening and soars over the tops of the trees in a straight line. So that if there are not a number of tall trees scattered through the cover, and you have a clear view, you will probably gain by not shooting too quickly.

Three kinds of snipe are found in Great Britain: the great snipe, the common or full snipe, and the jack snipe.

Of these the great snipe is the largest, but it is rare. It comes to our country in the autumn, and the few that are shot are generally found in the southern and eastern counties.

The common snipe is found all over the United Kingdom where there are marshes, but is most numerous in certain parts of Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Considerable numbers nest in England, but more come from the north during the winter months, particularly when it is very cold.

It is never found far from marsh land, but as it requires cover, it is not found on sands or

mud flats. The cover it particularly likes is such as is afforded by rushes, sedges and coarse grass. It also frequents the banks of streams.

The jack snipe is rather smaller than the full snipe, but it is very good eating. In very hard weather, the latter is often found to be in poor condition; the former, however, seems to be in fine condition throughout the season.

The jack snipe is a migratory bird. It begins to appear in this country at about the end of September, and continues to arrive through October and November, leaving about the beginning of March.

It frequents much smaller extents of marsh land than does the common snipe, and will often settle down in one which is only a few square yards in extent and quite isolated. Like the common snipe, it likes such cover as rushes and coarse grass.

No shot larger than No. 8 should ever be used for snipe. There seems to be some

difference of opinion as to whether it is best to work up or down wind for them. There is a good deal to be said on both sides, and so the question will probably never be quite settled.

As snipe always rise against the wind, it is obvious that if you work down wind, you will probably get a cross shot, which is the easiest. In working down wind, however, if the birds are rising at all wild, most of your shots will be long shots. Here a certain difference between the common and the jack snipe comes in. The jack snipe will generally lie much closer than the common snipe, so it is probably best always to work to them down wind.

When the snipe first rises, its flight consists of a series of gyrations. After rising a certain height, however, it settles down into a straight and steady course. This shows, to some extent, which is the best way to take them. If a snipe rises close to you, wait and let him settle down

into his course before you shoot. If, however, he rises at a distance of 35 or 40 yards, shoot at him at once before he begins his gyrations.

Though they are not gregarious, snipe are found close to each other in considerable numbers. They will rise singly as a rule, but if you flush one you are much more likely to flush another than if you had not flushed one at all. The first thing to do, therefore, after shooting a snipe (or shooting at one), is to load up again as quickly as possible.

Snipe are found where there is water and cover, but you will find that, except when actually feeding, they do not stand in the water. He chooses out a dry spot in a marsh or near the water to rest or hide in. Always make the most of snipe when you find that they are about, for they are here to-day and gone to-morrow. This applies particularly to the common snipe. In a frost you will find them near soft places—a marsh near a spring which does not freeze, a stream, or anywhere

open and where there is cover. They cannot stop where everything is frozen, for their delicate beaks can only dig in soft ground, and it is in soft ground that they find their food.

The only dog you want in snipe shooting is a good steady retriever, or an equally steady spaniel which will retrieve. You should depend upon flushing the birds yourself, but the dog is necessary to retrieve.

I have often noticed that some dogs which will retrieve other kinds of game well, will not touch a snipe, and sometimes even, will not bring a woodcock. It is supposed by many people, that there is something unpleasant about the scent of these birds, which makes dogs disinclined to touch them.

CHAPTER XV

Wild Fowl Shooting

YOU may be lucky enough to get your shooting in some place which is frequented by wild fowl. Of the ducks, the teal is the most get-at-able, as in places where it is not much disturbed it will feed all day on marshes, small ponds and streams. It will be most easily found where there is tall vegetation by the water, and in such places will lie very close.

The teal is a resident to a certain extent, for some couples nest here. Their numbers are, however, considerably augmented by winter visitors. The resident birds nest in the beginning of May, and pair for life. The winter visitors begin to arrive in September.

The teal never dives except when it is wounded. Where it is much disturbed, it spends the day on broad expanses of water and feeds only at night. When it is flushed, it frequently drops into cover again after flying a short distance. It is to a certain extent gregarious, particularly just before migrating.

As it is less shy than most of the ducks, it is the most easy to approach. The best dog for teal shooting, or any duck shooting for the matter of that, is a steady retriever which will take to the water well.

The time when teal are most likely to be found, is in the early morning and evening. When put up at these times, however, they are more likely to fly far than when they are flushed in the middle of the day. When found on their feeding grounds, teal are generally flushed singly. They are the earliest of all the wild fowl, being often numerous by the middle of September.

Wild duck or mallard* are found in similar places to the teal, but are much more timid and wary. In some localities they may be shot over a dog during the day, but better success is met with as a rule by seeking them on light nights, and very early in the morning. Not more than two guns should ever go after duck, and they should keep as quiet as possible. A frost, not sufficient to close up their feeding places, is the best kind of weather for walking up duck at night and in the early morning. Though there is, of course, a better light for shooting at night when there is snow on the ground, great care must be taken in walking, as the crackling of the frozen snow is likely to alarm the birds. This night and early morning shooting is also a good way of pursuing teal, especially where they are often disturbed during the day.

Widgeon are essentially coast birds, and are so timid that they are not likely to fall to the

* See Chapter XVI.

shoulder gun. They are winter visitors, and begin to arrive at the end of September. A peculiar thing about this bird is, that it will sometimes desert a particular district for several years for no apparent reason.

Some of the species of wild duck may also be shot by what is called "flight-shooting." As my reader will have gathered, it is the habit of wild fowl of some species to frequent open waters where they cannot be approached during the day, and to repair to feeding places inland at night. In doing this, the birds follow a regular line of flight, and it is of this habit that the flight-shooter takes advantage.

The first thing for the flight-shooter to do, is to observe the route taken by the birds, and to choose some place on this route where he can conceal himself. The birds begin to go to their feeding places at twilight, so you should take up your position in concealment about three-quarters of an hour before sunset. You must take your shots as soon as possible, for the

duck fly very rapidly, and will not be in sight in the dim light for more than a few seconds.

In some places where duck have been preserved, they may be shot by driving. The line of flight of the birds when they are put up is previously ascertained, and the guns are concealed before the duck are put up.

Plovers are very difficult birds to get at. There are three kinds which are sought by the shooter: the golden plover, the grey plover, and the green plover, peewit, or lapwing.

The golden plover is most sought after, being excellent eating; but it is also the rarest of the three. In the winter it is found in the lowlands, where it frequents marshes, pastures, low coasts, mud banks, and salt marshes. It feeds at night, and is found in flocks from the end of October and beginning of November, when it retires to the higher lands inland to breed. It is most numerous in the Eastern counties.

The grey plover is a winter visitor, being

found from October to May. It is commonest on the coasts of the Eastern counties, where it frequents those parts which are low-lying. It is found in salt marshes and the mud banks at the mouths of rivers.

The green plover is the bird which supplies the well-known plovers' eggs. These it lays in a nest which consists of a slight hollow in the ground, lined with dry grass and other herbage. The nests are found in grass fields, in tufts of rushes, and sometimes even in ploughed fields. It lays from the end of March to the end of May or the beginning of June.

The green plover is easily recognized by its peculiar mode of flight, which is very erratic. It makes frequent darts downwards and when it settles, it does not remain in the same place for long. These plovers are particularly numerous near the coast in hard weather during the winter. They frequent open land, such as down land and good shots may sometimes be

got at them by lying up in in a concealed place. They are not by any means bad eating, though rather variable in this way, their flavour being greatly affected by their food.

CHAPTER XVI

How and Where to Introduce Wild Duck

THERE are many shoots where the wild duck or mallard might be introduced with success, but has never been tried. The most suitable place of all is where there is a pond or small lake in a fairly secluded position, with a few acres of low-lying land with plenty of cover, such as rushes, sedges, and small bushes round it, and a stream running into the pond. The larger the pond the better, but the size of the stream is not of great importance; indeed, wild duck will often do very well on ponds which have no stream running into them. I do not think that it is much use trying to introduce wild duck on a pond which is of less extent than two acres,

and two or three ponds are, of course, better than one.

A small stream may be utilized for wild duck, but in this case dams must be built to make artificial pools.

In the first instance you will have to buy your wild duck eggs; but after the first year, if you manage things properly, the birds you leave should give you a sufficient supply of eggs. As in its absolutely wild state, the duck is strictly monogamous, you should leave about an equal number of ducks and drakes, inclining towards having a few more ducks if anything.

The wild duck makes her nest in a great many different kinds of places, some of them being most unexpected. When in a perfectly wild state, the nest is very often at a considerable distance from the water, and in the sedgy places near the source of a stream. The wild duck which has been artificially reared, however, generally makes her nest quite close to the pond or stream upon which she

A WILD DUCK'S NEST

ASTOR, LENOX AND
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was reared. Sometimes a nest is found among the rushes at the margin of the water, sometimes on dry land in cover of some kind—preferably under a bush. They are, however, rarely many yards from the water.

The wild duck which has been artificially introduced makes, as a rule, a bad mother. This is probably because she is more frequently frightened while she is sitting than is the duck under purely natural conditions, for she nests in less secluded positions than did her ancestors. This seems to induce her to nest close to the water, and to lead her brood there as soon as possible. When she gets them on to the water, she keeps them there all day and right on into the evening. The little ducks often are unable to find a place where they can leave the water, and at this early age are certainly not fit to be in it for any length of time. The broods which I have seen hatched by the mother under these conditions have always died, one or two of the little birds disappearing

every day. Rats and stoats might, of course, account for some of them, but I have found the dead bodies by a pond, having no marks of violence upon them. This points to the most probable cause of death being exposure. The wild duck in the natural state does not take her brood on the water in this way when they are first hatched.

It is therefore advisable to take up the eggs from the wild birds' nests and put them under a hen. The wild duck begins to lay in England early in April, laying about twelve eggs. Clutches of as many as seventeen and eighteen are sometimes obtained. They are about $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches in length, and are of a light greenish or yellow tint.

Much the same precautions must be taken in sitting the hen and rearing the young birds up to the age of two or three weeks, as in the case of young pheasants. A nice spot on a slope should, if possible, be chosen, and the little birds must be fed frequently and regularly.

A CLOSE VIEW OF THE SAME NEST

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They want feeding very soon after they are hatched. The feeding is about the same as for pheasants, except that a rather larger proportion of game-meal and oatmeal should be given.

As in the case of pheasants' and partridges' eggs, the eggs of the wild duck should be put under the hen in the coop. No flooring is necessary, and a slight depression in the ground with a little hay or well-broken straw pressed in, makes the best possible nest. Keeping the nest and eggs dry, whether they be those of the pheasant, partridge, or wild duck, is a mistake. It must be remembered that in nature, when the hen gets off early in the morning to feed, she will very probably return with her breast feathers wet, from seeking her food in the grass and other cover of a similar kind.

When they are three or four weeks old, the little ducks should be moved with the coops and hens to the water side. Choose a place where they can get in and out of the water easily. Rats, stoats, and pike are their most

dangerous enemies at this period of their existence. Feeding should be continued even after the birds have got quite wild.

If there are two ponds on your shoot, you can drive the ducks from one to the other in the shooting season, and thus get some really good shots by concealing the guns somewhere in what you have learned by observation is their line of flight. You will also find that the ducks will stray into the fields to feed, and may be put up in the most unexpected places.

CHAPTER XVII

Dogs

THE successful training of dogs for shooting, depends much more on common sense, tact, and the appreciation of the power of understanding in the particular dog being trained, than on experience in training dogs, taking into account only the number which have been trained. It is therefore probable that the well-educated man who has but little experience in training dogs, will succeed better than the uneducated man who has trained many. I am of course supposing that the educated man knows the first principles of training, and takes proper trouble to gain his end.

It is not wise to try to train every dog by set rules entirely, for the temperament, intelligence, and feelings of individual dogs vary in quality and quantity almost as much as do

those of human beings. It is in the particular application of the generally accepted rules as to the training of dogs, that common sense has a powerful influence on success. What may be the best way of training one dog, may be a bad way of training another of the same kind. You should therefore make a great point of studying the individual character of the dog you are training, for the better you understand the dog, the more easily will you teach him, and the nearer to perfection will you be able to bring his training.

Kindness, patience, and firmness, are essential to success, and each of these qualities must be used judiciously. If you are too kind, you will fail to some extent. If you are too firm, your success will only be partial. Absolute patience is always necessary to complete success.

Beating a dog, under any circumstance whatever, is condemned by some writers, but it is really necessary sometimes. Too much beating is, however, more evil in its effect upon the

training of a dog than no beating at all. The last thing you want is to cow a dog and break his spirit. You should never beat a dog for not doing a thing which you are trying to teach him. When you are trying to make him understand how to do something which he has not done before or has only partially learned, you want him to be perfectly collected and have all his faculties about him. If therefore you beat him at such a time, you will only confuse him, and upset some of the ideas which he has already gained.

A good dog generally tries his best to understand what you want him to do, so your best plan is to caress and encourage him when he has done what you want him to, and make him begin over again if he has done wrong. Carry some small pieces of biscuit in your pocket when you are giving your dog a lesson, for these will enable you to add to the point of your caresses.

It is only in teaching a dog not to do things

that beating is necessary, and I must here point out that the beating must be carefully done. Never kick a dog or strike him with a thick stick. These proceedings may injure him permanently and thus destroy his value, besides being unnecessarily cruel. Use a thin switch or a whip, for these cannot injure the dog but will hurt him for the time being. Never after beating a dog continue to show your displeasure by nagging at him and scolding. When you have beaten him his fault has been paid for, and he should realize that he is reinstated in your favour. You should, however, never allow anything he does, knowing it to be wrong, to pass without immediate punishment, otherwise he will think that he can commit faults with impunity. Never beat a dog unless you are sure that he knows what he is being beaten for. It is generally very easy to tell when a dog knows that he has done wrong, indeed he will often come and seem to ask to be beaten.

Always try to be alone with a dog when you are training him, particularly during his first lessons. Do not make the lessons too long, and always stop when the dog shows signs of being tired. As quietness is a most important thing when in pursuit of game, try as much as possible to train a dog to work in obedience to signals without speaking. Whistling does not frighten game nearly as much as the voice, so the dog's attention should always be attracted by a whistle in preference to a shout.

When you give the dog pieces of food during his lesson, do not throw them to him, always give them to him from your hand, and make him take them gently.

One point about sporting dogs which receives too little attention, is that the dog which is constantly with its master will work much better than the dog which is kept chained up except when he is out shooting or taking exercise. Make a friend of your dog as much as possible, and he will then work better and

more willingly than a dog which is simply a servant and nothing else.

For all-round shooting with only one dog, a spaniel is as a rule the most useful. A perfectly broken spaniel, however, is rare, and it is almost impossible to train some spaniels beyond a certain point. Sussex, field, and clumber spaniels are all good dogs, but they, with other kinds, have certain faults common to all spaniels of which it should be the trainer's special care to cure them. They have a tendency to run in as soon as the gun is fired, to chase rabbits, and to range wide and out of shot. It is most important to break them of these tendencies when educating them.

Retrievers are most useful dogs, but their value depends entirely upon the way in which they have been broken. It is comparatively easy to train a pup to feather only, but when once a dog has been allowed to go after rabbits, it is almost impossible to break him of this habit.

In a short work of this nature, it is impossible to hope to give more than general instructions as to the training of dogs; I shall therefore not attempt to do more than give my reader such hints as will put him on the right road.

The first thing to teach a sporting dog is to hunt by scent rather than by sight. This may be done by hiding small pieces of food in grass or other cover. It is, however, advisable to also make them follow a piece of food which has been dragged along the ground. The best way of doing this is to tie a piece of meat to the end of a long string, and drag it along the ground out of sight of the dog. Do not allow the dog to eat the food when he picks it up, but make him give it to you first. You should then give him back the food, and make much of him as he eats it.

If you are only going to keep one spaniel, teach it to retrieve if you can; if, however, you are going to use several spaniels together, only have one to retrieve, for if you

have several working, all of which retrieve, they are likely to fight over the game and maul it.

As running in at game is a serious and a natural fault with both spaniels and retrievers, you should begin to train them against this early in their careers. To begin with, teach them to keep to heel perfectly when they are told to do so. Take your dog about with you whenever you can, and you can then give him lessons frequently. Do not however take a pup out for too long walks so as to tire him too much, or try to teach him when he is tired. Whenever you tell him to come to heel, make him follow you as closely as possible. If he tries to run on ahead before you tell him to do so, give him a slight blow and speak sternly to him. Do not, however, hit him really hard, all you want to do in this case is to show him that he is doing something you do not wish him to do. At first when you call him to heel and he comes at once, pat him and praise him.

It is even advisable in some cases to carry some small pieces of biscuit with you to give him when he comes. The most fatal thing to do is to beat a dog when he comes at last after keeping you waiting some time, for if you do this he will hesitate about coming next time, thinking that all he will get is a thrashing. If a pup is very intractable, you may have to lead him on a short lead for some time on every occasion when he has not kept to heel.

You should never call a dog by any other means than by whistling to him; shouting will frighten the game, while a whistle attracts but little attention. Then when you tell a dog to keep to heel, do so in a low tone, or even better, make him a sign when he has come to your whistle.

When you have got a dog to come to your whistle, to keep to heel, and to hunt by scent, a great part of his education is accomplished, but you should keep him up to these things while you are carrying his education further.

A fatal failing in a dog which you want to teach to retrieve is having a hard mouth. Some dogs are so hard mouthed naturally that it is almost impossible to break them of this fault, and unless a dog is exceptionally good in other ways, it is not worth while trying to do so. In any case you will probably not be able to do anything in this direction with an old dog. A hard mouth is, however, often produced in a dog by the carelessness of the trainer. Never let the dog retrieve hard substances; much harm is done in this way by children throwing sticks and stones for a dog to run after. Never allow any one to try to pull a thing away from the dog, it will teach him to hold it too tightly and to bite it. You must make the dog bring the thing he is retrieving to you and give it into your hand willingly without trying to keep hold of it. Some soft object such as a sock stuffed with rag is a good thing with which to teach a dog to retrieve.

If a pup is hard mouthed, and yet you want

him to learn to retrieve without mauling the game, you must try putting some pins in the sock with their points near the surface and directed outwards. It is necessary, however, in this case, to change the object with which he is being taught frequently, otherwise he will soon find out that there is only one thing which hurts him when he bites it.

The next lesson is to teach the dog to "down charge," that is to drop on hearing the gun fired or when the trainer holds up his hand, and to stop still till he is directed to go on. The dog should first be taught to drop when the hand of the trainer is held up. First force the dog to lie down holding up the hand. If he gets up and tries to follow you when you move away, take him back, force him down again, and again move away.

Gun-shyness is a very bad fault in a dog, and is most difficult to cure. It may sometimes be cured in a pup, but if the dog does not soon get used to the sound of the gun, it is best to

give up the attempt. The failing may be to a certain extent guarded against by accustoming the pup gradually to the sound of a gun, particularly by making him connect it with his meals. Do not, however, fire off a 12 bore with a full charge close to a nervous pup as a beginning, for if he is once really frightened at the sound of a gun, it is most difficult to make him understand that there is no harm in it.

When the dog has once learned to drop to a movement of the hand, and to lie still till he is allowed to move, you will not find that there is much difficulty in teaching him to do the same on hearing a gun fired.

In the case of spaniels, pointers and setters, you must now begin to teach them to hunt game, and here the check-cord is a necessity. Without it you will find that the dog is sure to chase fur and even birds on the wing. Some people think it best to allow a pup to chase everything at will before his training is commenced in earnest, in the belief that this gives

him a keenness which he will not acquire in any other way. If the quick training of the dog is an object, I do not think that this is advisable, as besides learning, he will have to unlearn a good deal.

The check-cord should at first be about twenty yards long, and strong but light. The collar to which it is attached should not be hard or narrow. The young pointer or setter should be made to hunt for pieces of food hidden in the grass, and pulled up sharply when on finding a piece he tries to eat it. The trainer should then pick up the food himself and give it to the dog.

The dog has now to learn to quarter his ground, and this is perhaps the most difficult lesson to teach. The check-cord should be lengthened and the trainer should walk a field in a *zig-zag* fashion, encouraging the dog to go out on either side to the full extent of the cord, directing the dog with his hand to turn in the other direction as he pulls him round. He

will find that in a short time the dog will turn at his direction without any pressure from the cord. When this lesson has been learned, the dog may be tried at game, preferably at partridges. If he attempts to run in, or to move before he is directed to do so, take him back by force to the spot where he should have stopped, and make him lie down till he is allowed to go in. Do not keep your dog too long at his training without killing game for him, as this will encourage him more than anything.

In all these lessons, do not forget to reward and caress the dog when he has done well. If he does not drop when he should have done so, or does not stay down till allowed to move, always take him back to the spot where he should have been and make him do what he should have done. Never beat a dog for running in until you find that he cannot be taught not to do this by other means.

An important point to keep in mind is that

a setter requires water fairly frequently while he is working.

Training a spaniel with a check-cord is very similar to training a setter. The cord is, however, even more necessary, as the spaniel is the worst dog for running in and chasing that exists. Teach him at first to hunt in a zig-zag course in an open field. Your difficulty will be to teach him not to range too far so as to get out of gun-shot, so you should never let him range more than 40 yards from the gun. He must learn to hunt a field thoroughly, and to go in the direction indicated by the trainer. If he misses a part of a field you want him to hunt, take him back and make him hunt it. In hunting hedges he must learn not to go too quickly or to go ahead out of gunshot. He must also learn to go and hunt in the direction you indicate with your hand.

A retriever or a spaniel which is to be taught to retrieve, should be taught to take to the water readily during the summer. It is not

wise to try to teach a dog to retrieve from water when the weather is cold.

Retrievers should be taught not to run in at game by means of the check-cord. They can thus also be taught not to chase rabbits or hares when they are following a wounded bird.

Remember in all your training operations to use signs as much as possible and to avoid speaking except when necessary. If you have to use words of command, use single words and avoid sentences which will tend to confuse the dog. Your treatment of the dog should be consistent, for if you are sometimes strict beyond kindness, and at others foolishly indulgent, you will never meet with great success in training. Your dog must be convinced that you will invariably punish misdeeds and be pleased when he works well. He must have infinite faith in your power to direct him to find game, to punish and to reward him. I have already said that it is best to make your dog as much your companion as possible.

Dogs

The best age to begin a dog's training is about four or five months. Try to get a pup whose parents you know to be good and able workers.

I must conclude this chapter by advising my reader never to lend a dog which works well for him. One day's mismanagement will very likely spoil a dog. This points to the necessity of never becoming lax yourself, or your dog will get into bad habits.

CHAPTER XVIII

Miscellaneous Shooting

THOUGH my principal object in writing this book is to help the man of moderate means to manage and work a shoot of his own at as small a cost as possible, some information as to the best ways of getting shooting otherwise, without being put to great expense may be of use.

There are many hotels, particularly in Ireland, where the proprietors hold the shooting rights over a certain amount of country, and make this shooting free to their guests.

As well as being more numerous in Ireland, the shootings attached to hotels in that country are, on the whole, rather more productive of

sport, on an average, than those in England, Scotland, and Wales. In individual cases in Wales there is fair wild fowl shooting, and sometimes woodcock, but on the whole the Irish are the best. Grouse shooting, where the birds are anything but numerous and the work to get them of the roughest, may be had at several of these hotels. A good hard-working dog is a necessity in these cases. If setters are used, a brace is really wanted, for the setter cannot do as much hard work without getting knocked up as can a pointer. On the other hand, a setter will range wider, which is a great advantage where the birds are scarce. Many of the remarks which I have made about shooting partridges over dogs, apply also to this kind of grouse shooting. Work quietly up or across wind, mark carefully, and if you work up a hill, work round it in a spiral to the top, do not walk straight up it. Grouse in alighting, give a similar flutter with their wings to that given by partridges, so that will help the shooter to

mark them down. Do not work down hill if you can avoid doing so.

If there is high as well as low land where you are shooting, as there probably will be, always work the high land in the morning. Grouse generally go to the lower parts of the country to feed in the afternoon. It is when they are feeding in the afternoon that you will have the best chance of getting them. It is not much use going out in cold and wet weather, as the grouse are then very wild and pack together. In warm sunny weather they tend to disperse, and you will have a much better chance at dispersed broods, as the single birds lie better. In this kind of shooting, you will have to work very hard indeed for your birds.

Snipe are the birds which are most likely to give sport in shooting on land attached to hotels, for preservation does not seem to influence the stock of snipe on a shoot.

Free shooting exists in the United Kingdom,

but as one would expect, much sport cannot be got in this kind. Most of it is shore shooting.

Very fair rough shooting may be had in the New Forest, a licence for which costs £20 a year. Three days' shooting a week are allowed, but the shooter may have only three dogs and one beater. If a permit is taken, which costs £30 a year, the shooter may take with him a friend who is staying in his house.

A certain amount of flight shooting at wild fowl, may also be had at hotels, and even in some places for nothing, though in the latter case it is sure to be overdone.

CHAPTER XIX

General Hints

THE prompt and immediate recovery of wounded game is a matter which does not receive nearly enough attention from a considerable proportion of shooters. This is partly due to ignorance and to anxiety to go on and get more shooting. Of course in the case of a big beat, there is not so much chance of the wounded game getting away as there is when one or two guns are out with dogs, but even then special provision should be made. A wounded bird which gets off on to a part of the cover which has already been beaten should be carefully marked and some one sent after it at once with a retriever.

If, however, the case be not one of a beat or drive, much depends upon the individual shooter. To begin with, if you are sure that a bird is wounded, go on looking for it till you find it. A bird which is hit in the body though it may be wounded mortally, will often fly a considerable distance, so you should be more than usually careful to mark it down if you see any feathers come from it when you shot. Follow the bird up immediately and work hard to find it. If, when a bird is shot at, one or both of its legs drop, it is probably hard hit, but it may fly a long way. In this case, the longer you leave it, the worse will be your chance of recovering it.

My reader will thus see that in every case it is best to proceed at once to recover wounded game. It is also wise to go and pick up dead game as soon as possible, otherwise you will very likely forget the exact spot where it fell. *Always mark the spot where a bird falls carefully;* the neglect of this has been the

cause of losing more game than anything else.

Another excellent rule which applies to all shooting is, never go to pick up a fallen bird or any other game or allow your dog to do so until you have reloaded. After you have fired your first care should be to reload at once. The soundness of this advice is evident when it is remembered that not infrequently a bird will drop as if dead, but will get up again when it is approached by a human being or a dog.

I have several times referred to the necessity of keeping as quiet as possible when out shooting. This rule applies to all kinds of shooting, and there is no doubt whatever that the man who speaks least and walks most quietly, will get the most shots. Whether you are waiting outside a cover or in a ride for birds to be driven over you, or walking after game, the quieter you keep the better. Whenever it is possible, communicate with man or dog by signals, and when you

want to attract their attention, always whistle in preference to shouting. The human voice frightens game, but whistling causes but little alarm. If you are standing in a ride, do not move about but keep in the same spot without moving at all.

If you are sending game away as a present to friends, allow it to cool before you pack it. If it is packed while it is warm, it will soon go bad. When you send rabbits or hares away, always paunch them before sending them. Rabbits and hares should always be paunched as soon after they are cold as possible, for they keep much better when this is done. In order to make the carrying of rabbits more easy, they should be "hurdled." This is done by running a knife between the tendon and the bone of one of the hind legs, and then passing the other hind leg through the gap thus made. The rabbit may then be carried easily by passing a stick between the hind legs. Do not bury rabbit paunches

anywhere where there is vegetation, with the idea that they will act as manure. As a matter of fact rabbit paunches will kill any plants near which they are buried.

Do not be surprised if you do not shoot up to your usual form when you are tired or not in quite perfect health. A very small thing will upset your shooting. If you are of an excitable temperament, you must combat this as much as possible, for when excited you will not shoot well. Never take a shot in a hurry, as you are likely to do if excited, for the chances are that if you do you will miss.

Clothing is in a way an important consideration, for you should have perfect freedom of movement when you are shooting. Have your shooting clothes of a dull colour, as when you are walking up birds, a striking colour or pattern is sure to attract more attention than a sober one. A good plan is to have elastic let into the back pleat of

a Norfolk shooting jacket, for this allows a free movement of the arms and shoulders when the gun is brought up.

Boots are perhaps the most important item in the clothing of the shooter as far as his comfort is concerned. If you get good thick watertight boots to begin with, the time for which they will remain watertight and sound will depend entirely on the way in which they are treated. Before they are used they should be thoroughly soaked with dubbing. This is best done by giving them several coats at intervals of three or four days, and keeping them in a warm place between whiles. The soles and seams of the boots should receive particular attention and this point is too often neglected. People seem to think that if the dubbing is rubbed into the leather of the uppers, the rest of the boots will be all right. Rub the dubbing into the soles, particularly under the instep, taking care to get it well into the corners, and into the seam where the sole

joins the upper. After a day's shooting, the mud should never be scraped off the boots even with a stick. It is most important to keep the outer surface of the leather intact as much as possible. They should be sponged with warm water till all the mud is removed, and allowed to dry in a warm, but not too hot a place. When they are dry, they should be treated with dubbing in the way I have already described. As yet I have never found a servant who could be trusted to clean and grease shooting boots really thoroughly. Always keep trees in your boots, putting them in as soon as the boots are dry.

Tips are often a bugbear to the man of limited means who gets shooting invitations. There are a few men who will not allow their keepers to accept tips, but unfortunately these men are in the minority. With the shoots at which the enormous bags about which we read are made I will not deal. In other cases the following tips are ample. If the day's

bag comes to about one hundred birds to a gun, £1 should be given to the head keeper. On ordinary days 10*s* or 5*s* will be sufficient according to circumstances. A loader or the man who carries your cartridge bag should be given 2*s* or 2*s* 6*d* according to circumstances.

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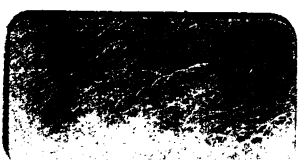
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